

Thursday night I went to see my first Charlotte Knights game in their new uptown ball park. The Charlotte Knights are the Triple-A baseball affiliate of the Major League Tampa Bay Rays. I don't follow professional baseball too closely but I did notice that the manager of the Durham Bulls, the team that the Knights were playing, was named Sandburg.

I wondered to myself if this was Ryne Sandburg, the former 2nd baseman of the Chicago Cubs. I did a little research and discovered that the manager of the Durham Bulls is the nephew of Ryne Sandburg. But in my research I discovered something about Ryne Sandburg which seemed to me to provide some context for the Scripture which we are reading today from 2nd Samuel.

Pastor Ken Evers-Hood tells this story about Ryne Sandburg. He recalls that "The most memorable game in Ryne Sandberg's long career as a second baseman for the Chicago Cubs came in 1984, when the Cubs faced the heavily favored St. Louis Cardinals. In the bottom of the ninth, the Cubs were down 9-8. The Cardinals put in Bruce Sutter, their ace reliever, and after a couple of outs everyone started pouring out into the streets.

But Sandberg stood and delivered. He smacked a fastball over the left-field fence to keep the Cubs alive. People started heading back to their seats. At the top of the 10th, the Cardinals scored two more to again dash the Cubs' hopes. But when Sandberg was back up at bat, with a man on second, he hit another home run to tie the game again. The Cubs went on to win in the 11th, and the event became known as "The Sandberg Game."

It was an extraordinary moment, but it wasn't Sandberg's finest. That came 20 years later, when Ryne Sandburg was inducted into the Hall of Fame. When he was inducted into the Hall of Fame, Sandburg said this:

"I was in awe every time I walked onto the field. ... I was taught you never, ever disrespect your opponent or your teammates or your organization or your manager and never, ever your uniform. Make a great play, act like you've done it before; get a big hit, look for the third base coach and get ready to run the bases; hit a home run, put your head down, drop the bat, run around the bases, because the name on the front is a lot more important than the name on the back.

That's respect. ... These guys sitting up here [he gestures to those already in the Hall of Fame] did not pave the way for the rest of us so that players could swing for the fences every time up and forget how to move a runner over to third. It's disrespectful to them, to you, and to the game of baseball. ... Respect.

A lot of people say this honor today validates my career, but I didn't work hard for validation. I didn't play the game right because I saw a reward at the end of the tunnel. I played it right because that's what you're supposed to do, play it right and with respect. ... If this validates anything, it's that guys who taught me the game did what they were supposed to do and I did what I was supposed to do."

Hugh Heclo quotes this speech in "[On Thinking Institutionally](#)" to suggest the importance of sensing our place within the world, our debt to the past and our obligation to the future. Sandberg's words about respect for the game and respect for the people who came before him illustrate that this is a man who was formed and shaped by something much larger than himself.

Ryne Sandberg knew he owed his career to those who came before him and that, likewise, he owed a great deal to those who would come next.

The text we are about to read is a hard text of Scripture to try to understand. In fact, as we read it we may leave with more questions than we have answers. Scripture is that way sometimes. Sometimes we read it and we don't get answers but we just come up with more questions.

In this passage we will hear about the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant is different than Noah's Ark. Noah's Ark was a big boat. The Ark of the Covenant was a big box. When I mention the Ark of the Covenant your image may be shaped more from the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark* than from the Bible.

In the Bible, back in Exodus, Moses receives instructions from God to ask a craftsman to build an Ark to house the stone tablets that the 10 Commandments are written on. So Moses has the Ark built from gold to very specific instructions. This Ark then traveled with the people as they wandered around for 40 years heading toward the Promised Land. The Ark represented the presence of God.

The Ark was featured prominently in the story of the fall of Jericho when it was marched around the city 7 times and then the people shouted and the walls of Jericho came tumbling down. The Ark was featured prominently in the story when the Israelites finally reached the Promised Land and it led the procession through the Jordan River.

We have been reading through 1st and 2nd Samuel over the past few weeks and in 1st Samuel the Ark is captured from the Israelites by the Philistines. The Philistines take it around to different locations but bad stuff happens in each of these towns. So the Philistines give it back. So now let's read about what happens next.

In the text that we are about to read, David is going to reclaim the central role of the Ark. As we read this passage there is debate about why David does this. There are also questions about what kind of dancing does David does here. As we read this text I invite you to ask yourself the same questions that biblical scholars ask themselves today.

Does the Ark play a central role because David wants to connect to their history and the way God has blessed them in the past or does David want to use the presence of the Ark for political gain? So which is it? Is David guided by pure reasons here or selfish reasons here?

Also, what kind of dancing does David do here? Is it inappropriate and erotic dancing or appropriate dancing? Is he twerking here or classical dancing? Ask yourselves these questions as we read.

Read 2nd Samuel 16:1-19

There are some really troubling parts to this passage. For one, poor Uzzah. So the Ark starts to wobble and Uzzah tries to balance it and he is killed. This doesn't make a whole lot of sense. One explanation is that this shows how one can never assume to understand God. There are just some things that God does that make no sense.

It makes no sense that Uzzah is killed for this simple and innocent act. But what we do know is that David becomes quite angry with God for God's act toward Uzzah. So angry in fact that David doesn't want to have anything to do with the Ark for 3 months.

So does David bring back the Ark for political gain or for pure and faithful reasons? Probably both. But even if people act in ways that they act for political gain God can still use this for something good. Our actions do not need to be pure for God to bring good out of it.

As the Ark comes before him, David is led to dance. Was it appropriate dance? In the story it depends on who you ask. Some thought David was out of line with his dancing while others thought it was appropriate. But either way, the dancing draws attention to the Ark and how the presence of God changes their future together.

Like I said, this is a difficult passage of Scripture which leaves us with more questions than answers. And that's OK. Sometimes God acts in ways that don't make a whole lot of sense. Sometimes we act in ways that are selfish. Sometimes our dancing is not very appropriate.

But even with all of that. God is still God and we sometimes do actions which are selfish. But God can use even the worst of our behaviors to make something good come out of it.

So we keep our attention to God and when we mess up or when we are selfish, we keep asking for God to make something good come out of it. It's not about us. It's about something bigger than us.

We keep trusting God even when God seems to do some stuff that does not seem to make a whole lot of sense. Again, it is not about you and me.

Ultimately God is still in control and that is where we need to place our trust and faith. God has a bigger plan than just what we may want or do. AMEN.

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-Evers-Hood, Ken, "What are you living that's bigger than you?"

<http://www.faithandleadership.com/ken-evers-hood-what-are-you-living-thats-bigger-you>