

## **Mercy Rule: God's Eternal Seventh Inning Stretch"**

The Christian Funeral of Alberta Brown

Romans 6:3-6 and 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:6-8

June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, especially Eric, Mike, Jan, Suzanne, Thomas, Danny, Ruth, Robert, and Ginny; Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who is the Resurrection and the life. Amen.

The text for this morning message is from Romans chapter six, which will be referenced later in the message and the Epistle reading from 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy which I read moment ago.

Consider the scene with me for a moment: It's a beautiful day in Buffalo, the sun is shining, the sky is blue and the Buffalo Bisons are scheduled to play the first game of the season. The Ballpark is packed, the grass is bright green, the dirt is fresh, Parachutes landed during the opening program, and the herd is dressed their best and ready for action. After all the pre-game excitement, the game begins and in no time the Bisons are up three nothing, by the end of the sixth inning they are up fifteen to one. The crowd is ecstatic, "take me out the ball game" in the seventh inning is sung like never before; with gust, power and packed full of emotion. At the end of the day the Bison take the win twenty runs and the opposing team one. Now in this last few days one thing that became evidently clear was just how much Alberta loved her Bisons. And judging just how much she enjoyed the team I would guess that this could be an almost perfect day for her; flawless and completely dominated in victory.

Now, I am no baseball pro... the furthest thing from it, but I would have to guess that such a situation as I described, is rather far-fetched and doesn't occur all that often BUT, when it does or if it does, I suppose that's the reason for this thing called the mercy rule, which is intended to relieve the opposing team of further suffering and humiliation. As I dug a little deeper, I discovered that this concept most often only applies to little league and college level sports, however, when applied it gives the umpires the power to stop the game at the seventh inning if the winning team has an insurmountable lead. As I thought about this concept a little more, I began to realize that something can really be said about this mercy rule especially if we apply it to the "game called life." You see the idea behind the "mercy rule" is relevant to us in the faith.

Nothing was truer for our dear Alberta. Indeed Alberta's life was nothing like the close to perfect day at the ballpark as I attempted to describe. No, in her game of life, much like for all of us, at times it probably resembled a nail biting kind of ball game. Life is like that isn't it, ups and downs, those times dominated by apparent victory and yet, too many times packed with those moments when we are feeling we are losing the game.

As we think about Alberta today, without doubt, feelings of happiness and joy were not foreign to her, were they? Her love for you Mr. Brown, a relationship blessed by God in 1953, the blessing of her children Mike and Jan, Suzanne and Tom, and Danny. Her grandchildren Bob and Ginny, her sister Ruth and lest I forget the blessing of peanuts the dog. Time of happiness in the innings of her life indeed. Her passion for the game and her hometown team the Bisons. Her love for children, her love for helping others, especially at the Erie County Home for so many

years. Without doubt the innings of Alberta's life were certainly showered with much delight. And while Alberta had many joys, what is equally true however, is in the innings of her life, she too struggled; struggled with her own sins she experienced suffering, pain medical conditions, disappointments, doubts, fears, and the like. Joy and suffering, but above there was one event that saw her through it all; there was one event in Alberta's life that dominates all else... the grandest of all the season openers in her earthly pilgrimage.

Friends, in Baptism, God in Christ clothes Alberta and **“buried her with him through death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, she too may live a new life.”** By way of Jesus' death on the cross and glorious resurrection from the grave, through Baptism, God opened the door to forgiveness and eternal life to Alberta. Taking upon himself the sin of the world, which surely would result in a losing battle if left up to us, our God declared the mercy rule removing from Alberta the consequence of foul play, and declaring forgiveness, victory and the promise of eternal life with him in heaven. Jesus had the insurmountable lead over sin death and the devil, and in Holy Baptism Christ covered her making her his child and promising to be with her through all the innings of her life.

Indeed, Alberta knew her need for Jesus. Yes, Alberta knew her sin and the need to put it to death. Moreover, Alberta knew the hope and strength promised her and most relevant to today, Alberta knew the place that awaited her. And friends, that is why her church community was so important to her, as apparent through her 44 years of worship here at St. Johns. Living out her Baptism in faith and remembering the promises of Jesus, she came to this place week after week... oh, not perfectly, but came to this place week after week to experience God's mercy rule- to receive a break from the humiliating ways of the world, the devil and her sin. She came to this place to find comfort and strength in the Word and Sacrament and she came to this place to rejuvenation and power for what lay ahead. Living out her baptism, Alberta lived out her faith as she lived in the joy of sins forgiven and as she lived in the joy of heaven secured, trusting that when she closed her eyes in death, Jesus would call her home. And that he did.... On Tuesday morning, God called the game of her earthly life and according to the mercy rule removed once and for all from the humiliations of this world, removed her from suffering, pain to welcome her into the mansion of glory. Alberta **“fought the good fight; she finished the race, and surely, laid upon her is the crown of Christ's righteousness.”**

Consider this scene with me: The eternal Son shining radiantly, street of gold, Joy as the dominating mood, songs of praise resounding, all things new; no suffering, no pain, no tears, no hunger, no frustration.

Perhaps, Alberta didn't get the chance to experience quite the perfect ball game... or maybe she did, nevertheless nothing compares to Tuesday! God's mercy rule went into effect and Tuesday when she went to sleep in the Lord, she experienced God's seventh inning stretch. In other words, all things were complete and unlike ball games here on earth it wasn't a roaring team singing, but saints and angles. It wasn't people with stiff muscles stretching to re-energize for victory or the disappointment ahead. No, this time, on Tuesday morning, it was Christ himself who outstretched his arms in victory and welcomed Alberta to her home opener in heaven. What was begun in Baptism, reached perfection. And so friends, right now, at this moment, Jesus is shining his face upon Alberta and she is gazing with immeasurable joy at his glory. She is

standing besides angels and archangels and saints singing and praising not the home team, but the King of Kings Jesus in all his glory. Friends, our dear Alberta has never experienced such a perfect day surrounded by uninterrupted joy as she is feeling now.

While it may appear from the perspective of our grief, the game is officially over for good, truth is, the game is just beginning... the season opener in heaven for Alberta has begun and never again will there be loss or disappointment ONLY joy and complete victory.

So what that means for us, is that as difficult as things may be right now, God's mercy rules applies to us as well... his promises and presence, through Word and Sacrament friends and family, are those things which will help us in our grief. In the face of death there is life and for us in the faith, although separated for awhile, we have the certainty of knowing that one day we too will experience the nip of death, only to be united with our Jesus all the saints who have gone before us on the day of our own eternal seventh inning stretch... our home opener in heaven just as it was for Alberta.