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Rylan Brue

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Do You Want to Have a Catch?

Rylan Brue

September 27, 2021

“Do you want to have a catch?”

If you’re familiar with the 1989 film *Field of Dreams*, you’ll recognize this question from the movie’s closing scenes.

If you watched the first ever Major League Baseball game held in Iowa this summer at the *Field of Dreams* set, you’re familiar with the way this question anchored the evening’s broadcast, appearing over and over again.

“Do you want to have a catch?”

When David Ortiz asked Kevin Costner about the film during Fox’s pregame show, Costner summed up the film this way: “At its core, it’s about things that go unsaid between fathers and sons and we wish we could just get it back. We can hurt and sometimes we hurt the ones we love the most. And our dads—its biblical almost—they just don’t understand, we think...and when boiled itself down, our big climax was, ‘Do you want to have a catch?’”

We wish we could just get it back.

What do we want when “we wish we could just get *it* back”? I think most of us understand intuitively what Costner is saying while being unable to name what *it* is exactly. All we know is that we want *it* back. We have lost something. We have made mistakes. Time has carried us downstream, and we stare behind us, unsure how to get back where we started. There is something disjointed with the world. Or is it us? Is it a relationship? Is it the past?

No doubt, the MLB tried its hardest to bring *it* back. The evening passed in a kind of nostalgic spectacle, topped off with a beautiful Iowa sunset. For baseball, it was a night of possibility. Maybe baseball could be a young person’s sport again. Maybe a divided country could unite around its pastime. Maybe being down in the bottom of the ninth doesn’t mean the game is over. Maybe failed fathers can have a second chance. Maybe banned-for-life-gamblers could play baseball again. Maybe...

It is the kind of thing that only happens in heaven. And, well, Iowa apparently.

Whatever *it* is, we do know that it sells. The average ticket price for the game was \$1400. The MLB isn't the only thing capitalizing on *it*, however. If recent box office titles are any indication, Hollywood has been trying its hardest give us *it* back with remakes of just about every film series they can lay their hands on. There is good money to be made with *it* these days.

I'm tempted to chalk *it* up as a kind of nostalgia—that longing for past times that can come upon us at any moment. Connotations aside, it is perhaps best to think of nostalgia not as a kind of longing for the past, but a longing for *possibility*. Nostalgia hits us most when our actions have handicapped us—when we awake amidst the pig-slop of our own decisions and remember a house where even the servants are well-fed. We remember what it was like to be *at* home. Because when you are at home, you are in the position to set-off in all kinds of different directions. When you are at home, life is brimming with possibility. Maybe I could do this. Maybe I could be this. Maybe...

Maybe I'm thinking too hard about *it*, but I'm a senior at university this year, which means I'm perpetually faced with the perennial question, "If you could go back and do it all over again what would you change?" In my case, a lot of things. But does that mean I would go back? No, I wouldn't. I would hazard a guess that most of us wouldn't. The whole point of the question is to articulate something our past has taught us that we could have learned in no other way. We don't actually want the past. We want our past to have meaning. We want the slights, insults, and the ways we've hurt other people to somehow have taught us something—to be woven into the new human we are becoming. That those painful pockmarks dotting our past could be transformed into something more: resurrection scars.

No, when we want *it* back, we don't want the past.

We want forgiveness.

Forgiveness deals with possibility. So does catch. Which is why it makes such a redemptive end to *Field of Dreams*. Catch, by all reasonable calculations, is a royal waste of time. It requires no critical thinking. It doesn't utilize human creativity. Catch is not even exercise (unless your partner has a wild arm). To play catch with someone is to imply that they are a person worthy of "wasting" time with—the kind of activity you do on those long summer days where it seems like there is no evening and morning.

As children, there are so many ways we work side-by-side with our parents. When we work together building the deck, our parents are beside us showing us how to hold the nail without smashing our fingers. When we practice piano, our parents are beside us beating out a steady rhythm. In catch, however, what we have seen only in part we now see face-to-face. We have *it* back—a wordless reminder that the relationship has survived all our arguments and misbehavior of the day. We remember and believe that somehow, someday, we are still their child, and they are still our parent. If Jesus had a ball and glove, I half expect he would

have played catch with the tax collectors and prostitutes just to show them there is no child of God not worth wasting time with.

Abraham Kuyper once wrote that “true religion is to have fellowship with the living God...And the goal of all worship services must be to let the assembled congregation taste that fellowship with their God.” ¹ Fellowship, like catch, is a waste of time. Kuyper’s remark is insightful because the Kuyperian tradition is all about wasting time. For those of us in this stream, there is not a modality that is not worth spending a whole lifetime unfolding: baseball and bubbles, board games and bridges are all sacred spaces—tents of meeting in their own pluriform way. It is certainly a rich vision. It is also a dangerous one. It is the kind of tradition that can easily become a lukewarm nominalism where the only square inches we waste time with are the ones that have donors. Or worse, it can be leveraged as triumphalism—a kind of Christian imperialism that speaks more often than it listens. Which is why, I think, we might do well to learn a lesson from *Field of Dreams*.

Before the Church has anything to say on the varied aspects of the world, before the Church gives direction to politics, and before the Church sets norms for technology and science—and I really do believe the Church has a lot to say on these topics!—before any of that, the first words of the Church to the world ought to take the shape of a question. The kind of question you ask when you realize, in Jesus, there is nothing—no angels, no demons, no powers, nor heights—that can keep God from wanting to play catch with humanity. An invitation to have *it* back again—Father and heirs wasting time together just for the heaven of *it*. ² A reconciled relationship where just about anything seems possible.

“Do you want to have a catch?”

Or, when translated into the language of the liturgy—what Kuyper called the climax of all worship:

“Do you want to have a meal?”