

October 7, 2014

Grace Church Family and Friends,

George Shuba died last week.

That probably does not mean much to you, and there is no reason why it would. George Shuba was not a Grace Church parishioner, nor was he very well-known or famous.

But, George Shuba meant something to me.

You see, my last year in seminary, I was preparing for my senior sermon, to be delivered in the Chapel of the Good Shepherd at General Seminary in NYC, when I came across an article about George Shuba in the New York Times. I was so moved by his story that I decided to incorporate it into my sermon, which I entitled "Jesus and Baseball," and people loved it - it was just that kind of story.

So, who was George Shuba?

George Shuba was born in Youngstown, OH in 1924. His father, an immigrant from Czechoslovakia, worked in the local steel mill. George loved baseball, and in 1944, he was signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers' organization after attending a tryout. George earned the nickname Shotgun for his ability to spray line drives, like buckshot, out of his left-handed batting stance, and he would go on to play in three World Series with the Dodgers during the 1950's.

George is best remembered, though, for a minor league game played on April 18, 1946. George was with the Dodgers' Montreal Royals farm team, playing against the Jersey City Giants at Roosevelt Stadium in Jersey City, NJ. In the third inning, George was in the on-deck circle, waiting his turn at bat, when his teammate at the plate, hit a three-run homer over the left field fence. As his teammate rounded the bases and crossed home plate, George was there to meet his teammate, his hand extended in congratulations. It was a very common ritual in baseball, one we still see today, only there was a big, important difference that night in 1946: George Shuba's teammate was Jackie Robinson.

Jackie Robinson was playing in his very first professional baseball game. It was the day Jackie Robinson broke baseball's color barrier, and there was George Shuba extending his hand in friendship and congratulations. Flashbulbs popped as photographers took pictures, and the image of the two men shaking hands has endured as a sign of hope and possibility.

All of us know about Jackie Robinson, as both an incredible baseball player and courageous human being, but we often forget about the George Shuba's of the world, people who make this life a little better with the smallest, most ordinary gestures of kindness and compassion. It is these people who love their neighbor as themselves that help change our world for the better and offer us a glimpse of God's kingdom.

So, here is to George Shuba and all those like him. With thanks, for everything.

See you at church,  
*Andrew*