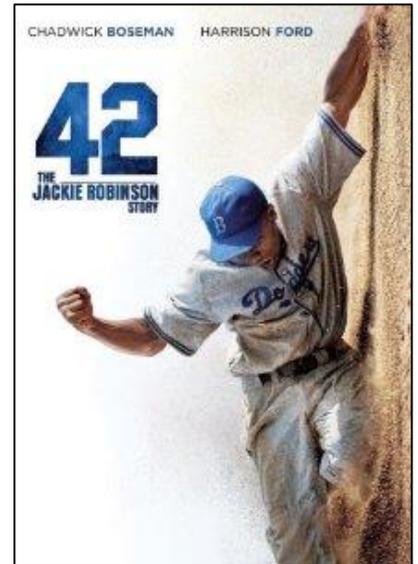


The conclusion of the Trayvon Martin trial last week was riveting for many folk in these United States, focusing as it did several intense issues in our land, not least of which were racism, gun violence, and laws related to self-defense. While on the one hand we can be grateful for our shared efforts at the rule of law, I feel fairly sure that for those of us of black African ancestry, the whole affair was extremely painful, being inescapably viewed through our nation's sad and often sordid history of racial persecution and violence.

As a white boy who grew up in Atlanta in the 50s and 60s, and who cannot remember ever being on the receiving end of persecution or discrimination, there is a fundamental sense in which it is quite presumptuous for me to write about such matters as these, except perhaps in repentance on behalf of the horrors perpetrated by my forebears and kinfolk. At the same time, I daily feel a deep sense of gratitude for the high privilege of serving as under-shepherd for a congregation that is more black than white, joining you on a sacred journey of being the Body of Christ, "red and yellow, black and white." I am almost constantly aware of walking on holy ground with you, and for that gift, I thank you.

As it happened, I've been intending to watch the movie, "42," which tells the story of Jackie Robinson's entry into Major League Baseball, and I finally did that last night. While the story of Jackie's heroism, achievements, and Christlike character ran powerfully throughout, I was still sick at my stomach for most of the movie, as I was through "Men of Honor," a story of the similar heroism of Carl Brashear as a Navy Diver. Most of the time, it's possible to keep the prejudice, the hatred and the fear so prevalent in our world "at arm's length," or just to "bracket it out"; but when it's filling the room through such films as these, I'm overwhelmed by all the horror and pain ("Schindler's List" was another such film).



The "turn the other cheek" strategy employed by Jackie and his boss, *Dodgers* owner Branch Rickey, was quite intentionally biblical, following the example and teaching of Jesus, as Dr. King did as well. Here's a paragraph from Dr. King's "Christmas Sermon on Peace" from 1967 that outlines the strategy with great power:

"I've seen too much hate to want to hate, myself, and I've seen hate on the faces of too many sheriffs, too many white citizens' councilors, and too many Klansmen of the South to want to hate, myself; and every time I see it, I say to myself, hate is too great a burden to bear. Somehow we must be able to stand up before our most bitter opponents and say:

"We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws and abide by the unjust system, because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good, and so throw us in jail and we will still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and, as difficult as it is,

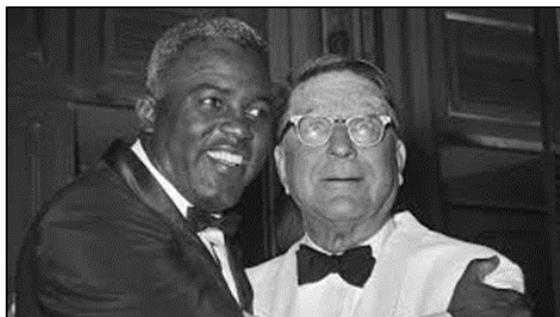
we will still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hour and drag us out on some wayside road and leave us half-dead as you beat us, and we will still love you. Send your propagandists around the country, and make it appear that we are not fit, culturally and otherwise, for integration, and we'll still love you. But be assured that we'll wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and one day we will win our freedom. We will not only win freedom for ourselves; we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory." And so it was . . . and is today.

I was inspired by "42," and I've done a little research about Jackie Robinson this morning. I was interested to see that the very first town in which Jackie experienced threats because of his presence on the Brooklyn *Dodgers* ball team was in Sanford, Florida. Imagine that.¹

Jackie was the Major League Baseball Rookie of the year in 1947 and the National League Most Valuable Player in 1949. He was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962, and in 1997, Major League Baseball retired his uniform number across all major league teams, the only person ever so honored by Major League Baseball, and the first pro athlete in any sport to be so honored. Since 2004, every player on every Major League Baseball team wears #42 every year on "Jackie Robinson Day."



I've discovered that Larry Doby became the first black player in the American League the same year that Jackie Robinson became the first black player in the National League (Doby was with Bill Veeck's Cleveland *Indians*).² And I've learned that Joshua Gibson is considered to be among the best catchers and power hitters in baseball history, so much so that those who saw both play were inclined to call Babe Ruth "the white Josh Gibson."³



I was impressed that it was their deep Christian faith that caused both Branch Rickey and Jackie Robinson to pursue the courageous courses they took, and Rickey later helped to found the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. As he reflected on his decisions, Branch noted that "**I may not be able to do something about racism in every field, but I can sure do something about it in baseball.**"⁴ And when Jackie's wife, Rachel, encouraged him not to let all the hatred and invective overcome him, Jackie replied, in the manner of Dr. King, "**God built me to last.**"

You and I have been given the same indwelling Spirit who gave Rickey and Robinson the courage to move our life on earth just a little bit closer to the Kingdom of Heaven. I wonder how our Lord would have you complete those same sentences today

- "I may not be able to do something about racism in every field, but I can sure do something about it in _____."
- "God built me to _____."

Dave

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jackie_Robinson

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larry_Doby

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josh_Gibson

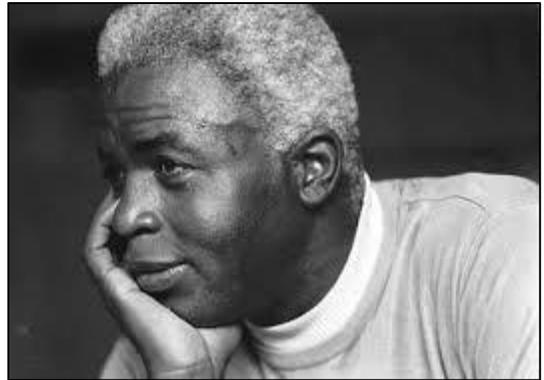
⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Branch_Rickey

There's more



The famous moment when Pee Wee Reese publicly endorsed and befriended Jackie Robinson in Cincinnati.

Don't you think this photo of Jackie looks a lot like Amani Dove?



Children's Ministry Confab

for EVERYONE

THIS SUNDAY, 7 p.m.

