

Prejudice

By Tim Thompson

Prejudice? Good Christians should give the benefit of the doubt first.

People are free to have opinions. Hopefully, they are based on actual observations rather than quick judgements though. Here is one of mine.

It was Spring of 1969 and things were quite different in America then. I was playing with a baseball, mitt, and pitch-back on my side yard when I saw my Mom speaking with our garbage man. He was a thin, "stringbean" type of man with baggy clothes, very friendly, and oh yeah, a black fellow - Mr. John DeLoatch.

He let my Mom know that they were organizing a baseball team through the town recreation and asked if I would like to play. He said he would pick me up and drop me off as needed, as my Mom did not drive (city girl). She said she would need to talk with my Father and would let him know.

I waited anxiously as my Mom asked what my Dad thought that night. "Well he sure works hard, find out what church he goes to?" was all my Dad said. An uncomfortable position for my Mom for sure but she found out and reported back, ha! All checked out and within a week I was a full-fledged player on the Spring Valley Gators.

Mr. DeLoatch would shake out an old army bag with two bats, four sack bases, and one batting helmet (we shared a lot more back then, ha!). He put me at second, even though I was a lefty, and would gradually hit sharper and harder ground balls until I missed. Then he would back off and repeat the proces to each position. It took awhile to get confident, and there was no sugar coating. You either made the play or you made an error, and it was silent either way. No cheering and no "nice try". Just harder and harder ground balls, ha! Oh yeah, did I mention I was the only white kid on the team? At nine years old I really did not mind though, as this is where I wanted to be - on the baseball diamond.

James Wilkins, Elwood Price, Henry DeLoatch and I had a great summer - and oh yeah the Mets won the World Series that fall! We were truly unaware of what issues the world may have been having. To us life was just fine.

I am still a HUGE Mets fan to this day, and still hit harder and harder grounders to my sons and then back off, just like I was coached. You see, that Summer took me from my Mom's apron strings to a much larger world, beyond just baseball, all because of one friendly garbage man who spoke up, and one understanding city girl who was willing to listen.