

Lovable winners?

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [May 27, 2015](#) issue



Starlin Castro, no.13 of the Chicago Cubs, bats against the Los Angeles Dodgers at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles, California. Photo by Jeff Gross/Getty Images via Thinkstock

During a recent visit to San Diego I became aware once again of the long reach of Chicago Cubs mythology. I wore my Cubs baseball cap during my daily walks and was often greeted by strangers with a smile and a “Go Cubbies!” New this spring was the comment, “This might be the year!” The mythology is rooted, of course, in the team’s consistently dismal performance.

The last time the Cubs won the National League pennant and played in the World Series was 1945. The last Cubs World Series championship was in 1908—107 years ago. No other major sports franchise comes even close to that kind of futility. The Cubs are called the Lovable Losers—it’s part of the myth. Preachers who know a little about baseball, and who are not averse to lacing sermons with a Cubs reference, are guaranteed to elicit knowing chuckles from congregations as far away as Dallas, New York, and New Orleans.

Everybody knows that the Cubs are a template for failure, mediocrity, and consequent despair. As such, they’re a perfect metaphor for some of Christianity’s most precious and potent theological themes: long suffering, patient waiting during lonely exile, hope in the face of defeat, light in the darkness, and life in the midst of death. I’ve turned to this rich reservoir of homiletical power regularly and shamelessly over the years.

Three weeks into the 2015 season, however, it appears that the hallowed mythology of Lovable Losers may be in serious danger. The team looks good—very good. Cubs fans are giddy with excitement at the prospect of a winning team, and maybe even contention for a championship. Now only the preachers are wary. Not only do we know about the propensity of human frailty, hubris, and sin to neutralize rosy optimism; we see the potential loss of great sermon material if the Cubs should suddenly become winners.

I am willing to pay the price. I would be more than happy to forego the references to futility and despair and indulge the prospect of a winning team.

In the foreword to Arnold Kanter's *Is God a Cubs Fan?* Rabbi Brant Rosen observes that "both baseball and Judaism are concerned with the mythic archetype of exile and return. The ultimate goal of both traditions is homecoming. In baseball players leave the safety of their dugout and run the base paths, with the hope of somehow finding their way to home plate. Likewise . . . the Jewish religion . . . maneuver[s] through the perils of exile, guided by the dream of finally returning home."

We who are Christians fully share that motif and add our own layers of meaning—the return of the Prodigal Son, for instance—and in this season of Easter we are reminded that our deepest faith is in hope gloriously realized and fulfilled in resurrection.

So maybe this is the year.