The most memorable game in Ryne Sandberg’s long career as a second baseman for the Chicago Cubs came in 1984, when the Cubs faced the heavily favored St. Louis Cardinals. In the bottom of the ninth, the Cubs were down 9-8. It looked like the Cubs were going to lose, so people began to leave the stadium. But Sandberg stood and delivered. He smacked a fastball over the left-field fence to keep the Cubs alive. People started heading back to their seats. At the top of the 10th, the Cardinals scored two more runs to again dash the Cubs’ hopes. But would you believe that when Sandberg was back up at bat, with a man on second, he hit another home run to tie the game again? The Cubs went on to win in the 11th, and the event became known as “The Sandberg Game.”

It was an extraordinary moment, but it wasn’t Sandberg’s finest. That came 20 years later, when he was inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Sanberg said, “I was in awe every time I walked onto the field. … I was taught you never, ever disrespect your opponent or your teammates or your organization or your manager and never, ever your uniform. Make a great play, act like you’ve done it before; get a big hit, look for the third base coach and get ready to run the bases; hit a home run and put your head down, because the name on the front of the uniform is a lot more important than the name on the back. That’s respect. … These guys sitting up here with me in the Hall of Fame did not pave the way for the rest of us so that players could swing for the fences every time they stood in the batter’s box and forget how to move a runner over to third base. It’s disrespectful to them, to you, and to the game of baseball. … Sandberg goes onto say, Respect. A lot of people say this honor today validates my career, but I didn’t work hard for validation. I didn’t play the game right because I saw a reward at the end of the tunnel. I played it right because that’s what you’re supposed to do, play it right and with respect. … If this validates anything, it’s that the guys who taught me the game did what they were supposed to do, and I did what I was supposed to do.”

Sandberg’s words about respect for the game and respect for the people who came before him illustrate that this is a man who was formed and shaped by something much larger than himself. Ryne Sandberg knew he owed his career to those who came before him and that, likewise, he owed a great deal to those who would come next.

This sense of respect for the past and the future is extremely rare today. In every era of great cultural transformation, people invariably become so focused on themselves and the changes they are going through that they lose sight of their past and become blind to where they are headed.

It’s what happened when Israel went through the incredible transformation from having judges to having kings. You see this clearly in the story of the ark.

The ark is first described in the book of Exodus when the Israelites would carry it with them through the desert. The box, with two winged cherubim on top, was filled with the two stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, some manna and Aaron’s rod. Whenever the ark was with them, the Israelites felt like they were invincible.

Except, in the fourth chapter of 1 Samuel, the unthinkable happened. The Israelites went up against the Philistines, who had chariots, and -- even with their ark -- the Israelites were no match. The Philistines captured the ark. Only the ark started making everyone sick who was near it, so they decided to return the ark. But even though Israel got the ark back, the people weren’t happy with it anymore. This is the moment when the people gang up on Samuel and demand a king so they could be like the other nations around them. The peculiar thing is, the Israelites basically forgot about the ark, where it became a dusty relic in the town of Kiriath-jearim, about 8-10 miles from Jerusalem.

It wasn’t until the first king, Saul, died, and the new king, David, decided to dig deep into the past that the old relic was retrieved. Why did David want to dust the ark off and move it to Jerusalem? The short answer is, David needed to somehow unite the Northern and Southern kingdoms together, and he was hoping the symbolism of the ark would help with his political cause. But David had lost respect for the tradition and had forgotten how to care for the ark, and his carelessness, according to the story in II Samuel, caused a young man named Uzzah died.

The story begins with David sending all of his men to Kiriath-jearim. He ordered a new cart to be made for the ark, and this was his first mistake. The ark wasn’t meant to be put on a cart but was supposed to be carried by priests, on poles. With the ark on their backs, the priests could feel the weight of God’s presence with them. The only people who had put the ark on a cart before were the Philistines.

The second mistake the Israelites made was forgetting to offer a sacrifice. They were singing and dancing and making a big racket. David wanted all of the benefits the ark could provide, but he didn’t want to invest in the work, the time or the money the institution of the ark demanded.

Two young men, Uzzah and Ahio, were assigned to drive the cart bearing the ark. When the parade of helpers came to the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen lost their footing and the ark began to fall. Uzzah, reached out and grabbed the ark. He didn’t know not to do this. According to Scripture, the anger of the Lord flared up and burst out upon poor Uzzah. He died on the spot.

David’s reaction is so telling. Like a little boy who has had his toy taken away from him, he was angry. But fear quickly took over, and David seems to have realized how reckless he had been. God is God, and we -- even King David -- are not.

Like David, we live in a forgetful, disrespectful time. Watch any professional sport today, and you will watch for a long, long time before you find a quiet leader like Ryne Sandberg who plays out of respect for the team and the game. You will see, however, a parade of egos, each one bigger than the next, dancing and celebrating like David did.

We are a people who have forgotten that the common good is more important than the personal good. We are a people teetering on the edge of forgetting that everything we have, our blessings, didn’t magically appear. People who came before us sacrificed to create all that we have come to take for granted -- our institutions of higher learning, our civic infrastructure, our economy. They built it for us to shepherd, steward, improve and then hand to our children and our children’s children and so on. We are merely a link in a chain, not the complete whole.

While we may have forgotten how to care for each other, all is not lost. In our lives with God, there is always hope that we can be reshaped, remade and redeemed. After David got over his anger and fear, he tried to recover the ark again, but this time he must have checked in with the Levites on how to move the ark correctly.

First, he dug around and found an ephod, a priestly garb, which served as a sign that he was taking this treasure seriously. Next, he gave up the cart. Finally, after those who bore the ark had taken six steps, they stopped and David offered a sacrifice -- not one, but two -- an ox and a fatling. Once David had yoked himself to the institution of the ark, THEN he danced. David, now, danced with humility.

Marta Moser brought a quote from a sermon that The Rt. Reverend Rustin Kimsey gave in August of 2014. Rusty sums up our Old Testament reading for today on how humility keeps us living authentically. Rusty says,

You cannot control God…and although it is necessary

to give God identifying words, if you come to believe

your description of God is complete and you have this

faith business all figured out…you had better duck. Such

containment of God is the birthplace of bigotry, prejudice,

religious wars and personal hypocrisy. I am for sensible gun control but I am even more for religions to be about their business without the claim they are right…and all other

beliefs are wrong. A good place for religions to begin is by being silent when they think or refer to their understanding of God…and pray a prayer of respect for all people whose faith journey is different from their own…such piety could do away with mountains of violence. May our faith journeys keep us humble. Amen.