

“You’re 5 Foot Nothin”
1 Samuel 3:2-10, 19
October 18, 2020

One night, Eli was sound asleep (his eyesight was very bad—he could hardly see). It was well before dawn; the sanctuary lamp was still burning. Samuel was still in bed in the Temple of GOD, where the Chest of God rested.

Then GOD called out, “Samuel, Samuel!”

Samuel answered, “Yes? I’m here.” Then he ran to Eli saying, “I heard you call. Here I am.”

Eli said, “I didn’t call you. Go back to bed.” And so, he did.

GOD called again, “Samuel, Samuel!”

Samuel got up and went to Eli, “I heard you call. Here I am.”

Again, Eli said, “Son, I didn’t call you. Go back to bed.” (This all happened before Samuel knew GOD for himself. It was before the revelation of GOD had been given to him personally.)

GOD called again, “Samuel!”—the third time! Yet again Samuel got up and went to Eli, “Yes? I heard you call me. Here I am.”

That’s when it dawned on Eli that GOD was calling the boy. So, Eli directed Samuel, “Go back and lie down. If the voice calls again, say, ‘Speak, GOD. I’m your servant, ready to listen.’” Samuel returned to his bed.

Then GOD came and stood before him exactly as before, calling out, “Samuel! Samuel!”

Samuel answered, “Speak. I’m your servant, ready to listen.”

Samuel grew up. GOD was with him, and Samuel’s prophetic record was flawless. Everyone in Israel, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, recognized that Samuel was the real thing—a true prophet of GOD.

Here ends the reading. May God bless these words as we seek to apply them to our lives.

Rudy Ruettiger knew from his days in elementary school that he was to play Division I football for Notre Dame University. His family was blue collar; his father and his older brother worked at the town steel mill and his mother kept house. It was assumed that Rudy would also work at the mill. He was a sub-par student all

through his formal school years and except for playing football, nothing particularly caught his interest.

Rudy told everyone he would one day play football for Notre Dame. This was a laugher, because: Rudy was not a good student; he was undersized to play football at a mere 5'6" and 165 lbs; he had no connections within the university; and he had no money for tuition. One of 14 children in his family, he was expected to help support the family financially, starting in high school.

But like Samuel, Rudy heard God calling him to a servant's life. As he later wrote it in his memoirs, Rudy was called to demonstrate the "Four C's: character, courage, contribution, and commitment." Rudy was an example of unwavering ambition to his disbelieving family. He was a living witness to his best friend who was killed in an industrial accident at the mill. Pete had given Rudy a Notre Dame booster jacket for his 22nd birthday affirming, "You were born to wear this." He was dedication and desire to his coaches and Notre Dame teammates, refusing to stay on the ground when hit, instead popping-- or groping—his way back up with his signatory line, "I can do it, Coach!" He was to become an inspiration to other kids with dyslexia, proving that hard work together with optimism can make your grades good enough to get into your dream college. Maybe not the first time you apply, or the second, or even the third. It took Rudy four tries over two years to be accepted to Notre Dame, but he made it and once there, he made the most of it. He got his degree in sociology and he played for two years as a member of the football team practice squad.

His unintentional mentor, an ex-Notre Dame football player-turned-groundskeeper, was nicknamed "Fortune." Rudy threatened to quit the football team before his last game as a senior. He complained to Fortune that the Head

Coach had turned down his request to suit up “just this one time.” The older man reminded him of what was right in front of him:

You’re five-foot nothin’, 100 and nothin’, and you have barely a speck of athletic ability. And you hung in there with the best college football players in the land for 2 years. And you're gonna walk outta here with a degree from the University of Notre Dame. In this life, you don't have to prove nothin' to nobody but yourself. And after what you've gone through, if you haven't done that by now, it ain't gonna never happen. Now go on back.

As it turned out, all of Rudy’s five younger brothers went to college, directly as a result of Rudy’s modeling to them that with hard word and commitment, they too could pursue their dreams.

Like Samuel, Rudy heard God’s call and once he understood what it was to be, he did not hesitate.

The 4 C’s are a good barometer for us as a church in these waning days of fall. As the days grow colder and shorter, we will be forced inside more and more. Our collective willpower and engagement are sure to be tested. Yes, we will avoid on ultra-cold mornings bundling up and heading over to church across iffy, snow and ice-packed roads. We won’t have to fear falling in the parking lot or getting to the church only to find out the worship service had to be canceled due to horrible weather. That is a bonus.

But those genuine hugs and warm mugs of coffee or cocoa, sweet treats and lively Callahan Hall conversations, we will miss those. Getting there early to hear the choir and pianists warm up, stopping by the church office to chat up the pastor for a few minutes, sitting quietly and prayerfully in the pews, those delicious moments cannot be replicated online. No, they can’t.

Our losses may seem insurmountable. As easy as it was to skip church on those frosty mornings when sense dictated you stay home, it is every bit as easy not to attend online this fall, this Advent, and this winter. “The show will go on without me; I’ll just turn over and sleep the day away. I have lost my church, so what’s the point?”

I hope you don’t feel that way, but I couldn’t blame you if you did. I feel the same way sometimes. Some weeks I am all bouncy like Tigger from the Winnie-the-Pooh story, and I am full of optimism and full-loving mischief in the name of God. Some weeks, though, I feel like Eeyore and it is a struggle to stay connected and social all week.

I can be anxious like Piglet, worrying about what is next for us as a congregation, or feel completely clueless like Pooh and just want to crawl into bed with a jar of honey and a good novel, and never venture out again.

The four C’s again: Character, Courage, Contribution, and Commitment—these qualities will define us over the coming months. God is calling us to be the Body of Christ in the world. How will we continue to live into our WHY as our physical separation continues?

We will not be perfect. Our music will not come through from my home computer to yours without some distortion. I do not intend to own that problem anymore. It is a fact of our worship lives. Zoom is not perfect. Beautiful.ai –our PowerPoint, has its anomalies and glitches. Forty some-odd computers all tuned in, all with video, slows down the transmission, not to mention the burden on the system from 40,000 other computers tying into the network all across the country on Sunday mornings.

Sure, we could record our services and post them on UTube for you to watch whenever, but that does not build or sustain our loving, caring, connected community. So, accept now my blanket apology if we mess up on a slide or don't get the music just right or if we go over by 15 minutes or whatever other technical problems we experience.

Live worship in our sanctuary was never perfect either. Remember how often my microphone went out? Or the time I forgot to have you say the Lord's Prayer? One time a church I was serving forgot the bread for communion and the head Deacon grabbed a loaf of sandwich bread out of the kitchen, took a few slices and tied them round and round with scotch tape and handed the whole sorry mess to me under a napkin. I just about lost my stuffing right there in front of God and Jesus and everybody when I lifted the napkin to bless the elements.

Wonkiness happens. We show our character by how we overcome the inefficiencies and limitations of our communication and transmission system. We thank our musicians for their dedication and devotion, we thank our singers for their gifts of song, and we move on, confident that we are the Body of Christ and nobody said we had to be so holy that we cannot also be human.

It takes courage to do what we all have signed on to do—to stay connected and engaged as UCC Parker Hilltop. The way is unclear. For now, we have decided to stay out of the physical church, for that is both the safest and the most courageous course of action against the tide of public opinion out there and growing coercion on parishioners & pastors alike to go back inside for worship. Other churches are doing it, why don't we? Because we have found a way to be together safely, and we have in the process found a way to keep our vulnerable congregants tuned in, to offer our WHY out beyond the confines of just a county

or two. We have found a new worship expression in imagery, color, words on a screen, video, and in the faces of people facing you rather than facing away from you.

Courage is not going back inside for worship just now. Courage is staying our present course and letting others chart their own.

Contribution will be necessary to keep our church healthy and fully capable of meeting the needs of these challenging times. I am, of course, talking money here, but I am also talking about your time and leadership. There are many opportunities we are not taking advantage of because we lack the leadership to do so. We need two or three new Council members at the turn of the year. We need men on our Care & Nurture Team. We have openings on our Missions Team and I could use administrative support once in a while.

The Covenant Commitment Team thanks you for keeping your pledges up and hopes you will consider making a year-end gift to the church as well. We will have big decisions to make as a congregation in 2021 and we are seeking your contributions of ideas and optimistic, out of the box thinking.

All of this is about commitment. Commitment is the umbrella under which all the other Cs take refuge from the current storms of our existence. Commit to get up and “come” to church when you are home. Commit to bring your children, too. They need what we offer them—unconditional love and encouragement, a church family that truly cares how they are doing and what they have to say, and the messages that we bring into the world that counter every other influence they unfortunately have to fend off. Be committed.

Peggy Campbell gave me this “Grace” art.



You will notice it has a crack on one side of it. When I first opened her gift to me for Pastor Appreciation Sunday, I thought it had broken in transit. And then I realized that was the whole point: to lend Grace where there is brokenness; to lend and ask for Grace when things are not perfectly delivered as perfectly imagined; to ask for Grace when we don't at first recognize God calling to us in the middle of the night, when because we can't locate our character, courage, contribution, or commitment, we can't answer God as did Samuel, "Speak. I'm your servant, ready to listen."

The next weeks and months will try us as a nation. In turn, the anxiety in our national systems, including our environmental systems, will bleed over into every social aspect of our lives, affecting our family life, our holiday plans, our government, our media, our children and our most vulnerable loved ones. We will be tested. We will be strained. Rudy's 4 C's can be a tool for us to keep our church on an even keel in these stressful days. Our community will need our church and its message, and that church and its message are YOU.

Let us pray:

Loving God, help us find in ourselves and model for others the best of our Christian character, the full measure of our courage, the extension of our contributions, and the depth of our commitment, so that when you call us into service, we can answer, "I can do it, Coach!"

And let us give ourselves a small measure of the grace you ask us to freely give to others.

May It Be So.

Donations to our church gratefully accepted:

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