

“PROFILES IN COURAGE”

**A SERMON BASED ON THE OLD TESTAMENT
BOOK OF FIRST SAMUEL (16:1-13) AND
PRESENTED FOR ORLEAN UMC ON MARCH 22,
2020-----THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT**

GRACE UNDER PRESSURE.

**THAT’S THE DEFINITION OF COURAGE,
ACCORDING TO ERNEST HEMINGWAY.**

**ALTHOUGH, TO BE ACCURATE, HE NEVER
ACTUALLY SAID THE WORD “COURAGE.” A
PROFILE IN *THE NEW YORKER* SAYS THAT HE
WAS ASKED, “EXACTLY WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY
‘GUTS’?”**

**“I MEAN,” HEMINGWAY SAID, “GRACE UNDER
PRESSURE.”**

SOME BOOKS MISTAKENLY QUOTE HIM AS SAYING, “COURAGE IS GRACE UNDER PRESSURE.” -----

BUT GUTS OR COURAGE — WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE, REALLY? THE LINE WAS PART OF A CONVERSATION ABOUT COURAGE, AND IT BECAME FAMOUS AFTER IT APPEARED IN *THE NEW YORKER*.

LATER, SENATOR ---- AND LATER PRESIDENT ----. JOHN F. KENNEDY USED THE LINE IN THE FIRST CHAPTER OF HIS BOOK, *PROFILES IN COURAGE*.

THE BOOK CONTAINS THE STORIES OF EIGHT UNITED STATES SENATORS AND THE WAYS IN WHICH THEY RESPONDED GRACEFULLY TO PRESSURE — SOMETIMES RISKING THEIR POPULARITY AND THEIR CAREERS.

ALL SHOWED COURAGE: GRACE UNDER PRESSURE.

EXAMPLES?....AND THERE ARE MANY, MANY TO BE FOUND.....

CONSIDER WITOLD PILECKI, A POLISH SOLDIER WHO, IN 1940, VOLUNTEERED TO JOIN A GERMAN ROUNDUP SO HE COULD REPORT ON WHAT WAS GOING ON INSIDE A NEW CONCENTRATION CAMP CALLED AUSCHWITZ.

**THEN THERE'S THE LATE REAR ADMIRAL
JEREMIAH DENTON, AN AMERICAN PRISONER-
OF-WAR IN VIETNAM FOR NEARLY EIGHT LONG
YEARS..... WHO SIGNALLED THE ABUSE THAT
POWS WERE SUFFERING BY BLINKING, IN A
PROPAGANDA VIDEO, THE MESSAGE T-O-R-T-U-
R-E IN MORSE CODE.**

**LET'S NOT FORGET HARRIET TUBMAN, WHO
ESCAPED SLAVERY VIA THE UNDERGROUND
RAILROAD AND THEN RISKED RE-ENSLAVEMENT
AND DEATH..... SHE RETURNED TO THE SOUTH
ON AT LEAST 19 TRIPS TO GUIDE AS MANY AS
300 ENSLAVED AMERICANS TO FREEDOM.**

ALL FACED TREMENDOUS PRESSURE, AND THEY RESPONDED WITH GRACE. THAT IS, THEY SHOWED FITNESS AND GOODNESS IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS. THEIR EXCELLENCE AND PERSONAL POWER SEEMED TO COME STRAIGHT FROM GOD.

THEY ARE ALL -----PROFILES IN COURAGE.

ANOTHER STORY OF GRACE UNDER PRESSURE COMES FROM OUR TEXT FOR TODAY FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOK OF FIRST SAMUEL.....

THE PROPHET SAMUEL WAS ACTIVE DURING THE REIGN OF KING SAUL, AND HE WAS NOT IMPRESSED BY THE LEADERSHIP OF THE KING.

AS CHAPTER 16 BEGINS, THE LORD SAYS TO SAMUEL, “HOW LONG WILL YOU GRIEVE OVER SAUL? I HAVE REJECTED HIM FROM BEING KING OVER ISRAEL”

GOD INSTRUCTS SAMUEL TO FILL HIS HORN WITH OIL AND TAKE A TRIP TO SEE A MAN NAMED JESSE IN BETHLEHEM. THE LORD TELLS SAMUEL THAT HE HAS IDENTIFIED A NEW KING FROM AMONG THE SONS OF JESSE.

BUT SAMUEL ASKS, “HOW CAN I GO? IF SAUL HEARS OF IT, HE WILL KILL ME.” SAMUEL KNOWS THAT KING SAUL IS POWERFUL AND RUTHLESS. HE WILL NOT HESITATE TO “REMOVE” THOSE WHO OPPOSE HIM.

**GOD COMES UP WITH A COVER FOR SAMUEL,
SAYING, “TAKE A HEIFER WITH YOU, AND SAY, ‘I
HAVE COME TO SACRIFICE TO THE LORD.’ INVITE
JESSE TO THE SACRIFICE, AND I WILL SHOW
YOU WHAT YOU SHALL DO; AND YOU SHALL
ANOINT FOR ME THE ONE WHOM I NAME TO
YOU” ----- *THEN SAMUEL, BELIEVING THAT GOD
IS WITH HIM, TAKES A LEAP OF FAITH AND HITS
THE ROAD FOR BETHLEHEM.***

**WHEN HAVE YOU TAKEN A SIMILAR LEAP,
TRUSTING THAT GOD IS WITH YOU?**

- . PERHAPS YOU'VE BEEN THE NEW KID IN SCHOOL, WALKING INTO HOMEROOM FOR THE FIRST TIME AND SENSING EVERYONE'S EYES ARE ON YOU.**
- . OR, YOU WERE THE NEW EMPLOYEE AT A BIG FIRM, HIRED RIGHT OUT OF COLLEGE.**
- . OR PERHAPS YOU WERE A MEMBER OF A WEDDING COUPLE, MAKING MARRIAGE VOWS IN FRONT OF FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS.**
- . OR A POLICE OFFICER GOING OUT ON A NIGHT PATROL.**

- . OR A MEMBER OF THE MILITARY ON DEPLOYMENT IN A WAR ZONE.**
- . MAYBE YOU'VE BEEN A FRIEND WHO IS CHALLENGED TO SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE, AND TO HOLD ANOTHER FRIEND ACCOUNTABLE.**
- . OR MAYBE A NEW FIREFIGHTER----- RESPONDING TO YOUR FIRST REAL CALL**

. OR --- AS I REMEMBER SO CLEARLY ---- A
YOUNG SAILOR REPORTING FOR DUTY ON MY
FIRST SHIP....WALKING UP THE
GANGWAY....SALUTING THE
FLAG....REQUESTING TO COME ABOARD AND
HOPING THAT I FIT IN.....THAT I WILL NOT MESS
UP.....THAT I HAVE SAID ALL OF THE CORRECT
WORDS IN THE CORRECT WAY

**ALL REQUIRE LEAPS OF FAITH, TRUSTING THAT
GOD IS WITH YOU.**

ALL REQUIRE GRACE UNDER PRESSURE.

THE GOOD NEWS FROM FIRST SAMUEL IS THAT
GOD PROVIDES A WAY. GOD DOES NOT SIMPLY
SAY TO SAMUEL, “GO ANOINT A NEW KING.
LOTS A LUCK.” NO, THE LORD GIVES SAMUEL A
PATH TO WALK, ONE THAT WILL NOT AROUSE
THE SUSPICIONS OF KING SAUL.

*WHEN WE FACE CHALLENGING SITUATIONS, THE
LORD WILL BE WITH US, TOO. OUR CHRISTIAN
FAITH GIVES US OUTSTANDING GUIDANCE
ABOUT HOW TO BEHAVE AS STUDENTS,
EMPLOYEES, MARRIAGE PARTNERS, POLICE
OFFICERS, SOLDIERS AND SAILORS AND
FRIENDS.*

BY SPEAKING AND ACTING IN WAYS
CONSISTENT WITH OUR FAITH, WE CAN WALK IN
HOPE AND LOVE, AND SHOW REAL GRACE
UNDER PRESSURE. WE CAN FACE UNCERTAINTY
AND DANGER WITH CONFIDENCE, KNOWING
THAT THE LORD WILL GIVE US THE EXCELLENCE
AND THE POWER WE NEED.

WITH THE HELP OF GOD, EACH OF US CAN BE A
PROFILE IN COURAGE.

SAMUEL DISCOVERS THIS TO BE TRUE WHEN HE WALKS INTO BETHLEHEM. THE ELDERS OF THE CITY ARE TREMBLING WHEN THEY COME TO MEET HIM, AND THEY SAY, “DO YOU COME PEACEABLY?” . THEY KNOW THAT THERE IS CONFLICT IN THE LAND, AND THAT SAUL HAS BEEN REJECTED AS KING..... ISRAEL IS AS DIVIDED AS WE ARE AS A COUNTRY, WITH RED STATE CITIZENS NOT WANTING TO DEAL WITH BLUE STATE CITIZENS, AND VICE VERSA. THE ELDERS WORRY THAT THE PROPHET SAMUEL WILL ENFLAME TENSIONS IN THE LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM.

BUT SAMUEL SAYS, “PEACEABLY; I HAVE COME TO SACRIFICE TO THE LORD; SANCTIFY YOURSELVES AND COME WITH ME TO THE SACRIFICE.” AND HE INVITES JESSE AND HIS SONS TO THE SACRIFICE AS WELL. YOU COULD SAY THAT SAMUEL IS A NON-ANXIOUS PRESENCE AMONG THE PEOPLE OF BETHLEHEM..... HE DOESN'T COME TO STIR UP TROUBLE, BUT TO PERFORM AN IMPORTANT RITUAL IN THE LIVES OF THE PEOPLE.

**WE CAN DO THE SAME WHENEVER WE PRACTICE
OUR FAITH TODAY. OUR CHALLENGE AS
CHRISTIANS IN A POLARIZED SOCIETY IS TO
“SACRIFICE TO THE LORD,” AS SAMUEL DID, AND
TO SANCTIFY OURSELVES — TO BECOME EVER
MORE HOLY SERVANTS OF GOD..... WHEN WE
GATHER FOR WORSHIP, WE SHOULD CONFESS
OUR SINS, HEAR GOD’S WORD, PRAY FOR
OURSELVES AND OTHERS AND CELEBRATE THE
SACRAMENTS..... OUR GATHERINGS SHOULD
ALWAYS BE DONE PEACEABLY, WITH RESPECT
FOR OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS ACROSS THE
POLITICAL SPECTRUM.**

**YES, IT IS TRUE THAT OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH HAS
POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS. WE MUST ADDRESS
MORAL ISSUES THAT SHAPE THE CHOICES WE
MAKE AS INDIVIDUALS, AS WELL AS THE
DECISIONS OF OUR ELECTED LEADERS.**

**BUT THERE IS NO ROOM FOR PARTISAN
POLITICS IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH. LIKE
SAMUEL, WE SHOULD FOCUS ON SANCTIFYING
OURSELVES AND MAKING SACRIFICES TO THE
LORD..... COMING TOGETHER PEACEABLY,
WHENEVER WE GATHER AS A CHURCH, IS
ANOTHER WAY THAT WE SHOW GRACE UNDER
PRESSURE.**

THEN SAMUEL TAKES A LOOK AT EACH OF THE SONS OF JESSE, AND *HE LISTENS CAREFULLY TO WHAT GOD IS SAYING TO HIM.* AT FIRST, ELIAB LOOKS LIKE THE ONE, BUT GOD SAYS TO SAMUEL, “DO NOT LOOK ON HIS APPEARANCE OR ON THE HEIGHT OF HIS STATURE, BECAUSE I HAVE REJECTED HIM; FOR THE LORD DOES NOT SEE AS MORTALS SEE; THEY LOOK ON THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE, BUT THE LORD LOOKS ON THE HEART” -----HEAR THESE WORDS YET AGAIN.....THIS IS YOUR TAKE HOME FOR TODAY:

**“DO NOT LOOK ON HIS APPEARANCE OR ON
THE HEIGHT OF HIS STATURE, BECAUSE I HAVE
REJECTED HIM; FOR THE LORD DOES NOT SEE
AS MORTALS SEE; THEY LOOK ON THE
OUTWARD APPEARANCE, BUT THE LORD LOOKS
ON THE HEART” -----**

**IT TAKES COURAGE TO LOOK BEYOND
OUTWARD APPEARANCE, BECAUSE THE WORLD
TENDS TO FAVOR PEOPLE WHO ARE TALL AND
GOOD-LOOKING AND EXPERIENCED..... BUT THE
LORD LOOKS ON THE HEART.**

**THEN JESSE CALLS ABINADAB..... SAMUEL SAYS
NO.**

SHAMMAH..... NO.

NETHANEEL..... NO.

OZEM..... NO.

RADDAI..... NO.

**THEN SAMUEL ASKS JESSE, “ARE ALL YOUR
SONS HERE?” JESSES SAYS THAT ONLY THE
YOUNGEST IS LEFT, AND HE IS KEEPING THE
SHEEP. SO SAMUEL ORDERS HIM TO SUMMON
THE BOY, AND WHEN HE ARRIVES, GOD SAYS,
“RISE AND ANOINT HIM; FOR THIS IS THE ONE”**

**SAMUEL ANOINTS DAVID AS KING IN THE
PRESENCE OF HIS BROTHERS, AND THE SPIRIT
OF THE LORD COMES MIGHTILY UPON DAVID
“FROM THAT DAY FORWARD”**

**IF WE ARE GOING TO SEE PEOPLE AS GOD SEES
THEM, SOME COURAGE IS REQUIRED. WE HAVE
TO LOOK BEYOND OUTWARD APPEARANCES TO
THE QUALITIES THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO GOD:
FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT SUCH AS “LOVE, JOY,
PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GENEROSITY,
FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS AND SELF-
CONTROL”**

**IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
NOMINATING COMMITTEES WORK EACH YEAR
TO IDENTIFY CANDIDATES TO SERVE AS
OFFICERS AND LEADERS IN THE CHURCH.....
THE JOB IS OFTEN DIFFICULT, BECAUSE MANY
POTENTIAL CANDIDATES ARE SO STRESSED
AND BUSY THAT THEY DECLINE THE INVITATION
TO SERVE..... NOMINATING COMMITTEES OFTEN
HAVE TO INVITE NUMEROUS CANDIDATES
BEFORE THEY HAVE A FULL SLATE OF OFFICERS
FOR THE NEW YEAR.....**

ONE YEAR, ANOTHER NOMINATING COMMITTEE AT ANOTHER VIRGINIA CHURCH HAD WORKED ITS WAY THROUGH ITS LIST, FROM ITS TOP CANDIDATES TO THE BOTTOM. THEY WERE ALMOST OUT OF PEOPLE..... BUT NEAR THE BOTTOM OF THE LIST WAS A WOMAN WHO HAD NEVER BEEN ASKED TO SERVE IN ANY POSITION IN THE CHURCH..... WHEN SHE WAS INVITED, SHE ACCEPTED ENTHUSIASTICALLY, AND SHE BECAME ONE OF THE FINEST LEADERS THAT THE CHURCH HAD EVER HAD.

MANY POTENTIAL CANDIDATES HAD TO SAY NO BEFORE THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE GOT TO HER. THAT IS BECAUSE THE LORD DOES NOT SEE AS MORTALS SEE.

**GRACE UNDER PRESSURE IS SHOWN WHEN
PEOPLE SHOW FITNESS AND GOODNESS IN
DIFFICULT SITUATIONS, WHEN THEY TAKE A
LEAP OF FAITH, BELIEVE THAT GOD WILL
PROVIDE A WAY, AND LISTEN CAREFULLY TO
WHAT GOD IS SAYING.**

**SUCH PEOPLE PROVE THAT GOD IS ALWAYS AT
WORK, DEVELOPING NEW PROFILES IN
COURAGE.**

**THANKS BE TO GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU
AND FOR ME.....AMEN.....**