

# CALLED TO THE COMMON GOOD - TRUST IN THE SOURCE

## Ordinary Time

Deuteronomy 6:1-9  
(Selected verses)

A Sermon Preached by Pastor Peter Ilgenfritz  
University Congregational United Church of Christ  
Seattle, Washington 98125  
September 18, 2016

Scripture:

**Deuteronomy 6:1-9**<sup>1</sup>

This is the commandment, the rules, and regulations, that God, your God, commanded me to teach you to live out in the land you're about to cross into to possess. Love God, your God, with your whole heart: love God with all that's in you, love God with all you've got!

Write these commandments that I've given you today on your hearts. Get them inside of you and then get them inside your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street. Talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night. Tie them on your hands and foreheads as a reminder; inscribe them on the door posts of your homes and on your city gates.

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Pastor Peter Ilgenfritz

Prayer.

Homecoming God,  
In all that you are — grounding grace, breath, spirit, light  
— be with us and help us find, all of us, our way back home again. — Amen.

You know, it all comes down to moments like this. It's the first game of the series, bottom of the eighth; the team is down 6-4. And you're standing there on third base. What do you do? Do you wait with the hope that your teammate may yet — iffy batter that he is — might hit you home. Or do you take a mad dash for it and run for home and see if you can make it. What do you do? And here's the thing it's the fourth time — it is the fourth time you have led your team to this very place and each time you have lost to the Yankees! What are you gonna do?

Stealing base is one of the riskiest things to do in baseball, and stealing for home is the riskiest thing of all to do. The greatest stealer of all time Ricky Henderson: 1400 steals; only *one* steal to home. Second greatest dealer of all time Lou Brock: 938 steals, no steals for home.

And then there's this. You're 36. You're a bit old! You're gray. And you missed a third of the season because of injuries. And, yeah, you put on a little weight. And the sportscasters out there, they call

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<sup>1</sup> The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language. Translated by Eugene H. Peterson, ©2002.

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you "the old, gray *fat* man." You stand there and you wonder, "What am I going to do?" as you dance back and forth, further and further away from the base.

It all comes down to moments like this. On that morning amidst all of the debris and the smoke and the chaos, amidst it all, the things that people will remember – the thing that they will remember – is that there was a man with a red bandanna tied around his face. Janet Ying will remember. She'll remember how this tall man called out with a commanding voice and pointed people towards the stairs, showing them the way to safety and to home. She will remember how this man came down and picked her up and carried her down 17 floors and then went back up to lead others down to safety again. June Downs very well remembers that because she says, "Because he came back, my life was saved." It was many, many years before anyone learned *who* the man in the red bandanna was on that tragic day.

Now Jackie Robinson on that day, standing there on third base at the beginning of the Series, remembered who he was. There is the word from Deuteronomy that we heard today, probably one of the most quoted and remembered verses in all of Deuteronomy – which is a very long book full of lots of rules and regulations – but there is this: "Remember who you are." Remember who you are and that there is a God who calls you to go and to live out that love and, though you are going into a strange land, may you *never* forget, may you never forget who you are. No, may you inscribe it upon your heart; may you teach it to your children and your children's children. May you tie it around your foreheads and around your forearms. May you keep it on the doorpost of your house. Remember who you are.

Jackie Robinson remembered that day standing there on third base who he was. And what he remembered was this: he was a man who when other people say, "Stay put", he moved. And on that day that he third stood on third base, he waited for his moment and then he moved. And he ran. He had to run 90 feet to out-run a ball. And he made it to base! He slid in! And right then the catcher came down and tagged him. And *nothing* was clear until the umpire called him "Safe."

Jackie Robinson, it has been said, great stealer towards home that he was. (Aah) It was the second greatest thing, second greatest thing he ever did. In baseball the greatest thing he ever did was break the color barrier. It was 1947, a year that some of us today remember. 1947. It wasn't very long ago, but boy does it feel like a lifetime ago to be the *very first black player* to break the race barrier in major league baseball. And, no, it was not easy. He had teammates that said, "We will not play with you." He had opponents that *kicked* him with their spikes. He got hate mail and death threats.

What gave Jackie Robinson his courage? He said, "It got implanted in me by two men." One of them was Carl Anderson, a mechanic, who happened to be at the jail house that day when Jackie Robinson *again* was brought into the jailhouse under gunpoint by the sheriff for *again* being mixed up with that gang, for *again* throwing rocks and throwing stones and shoplifting. And Carl Anderson came over to Jackie Robinson and he said, "Look, guy! Look! It doesn't take any guts in the world to follow the crowd, but it takes courage and intelligence to be willing to be different." Remember who you are.

And it was his young pastor Carl Downs at the missionary Baptist Church who, too, put his hand on Jackie Robinson's shoulder, and he taught him and, better yet, he showed him something about this Jesus, who didn't just go along with the crowd but had these words inscribed upon his heart and lived

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them out. And he instilled in Jackie "You, too, are called to do the same." Inspired by a pastor who reached out of the confines of his pretty conservative church to break it open and reach out to people like Jackie. And he made such a difference on his life that, lo and behold! Jackie Robinson of all things became a Sunday school teacher. My goodness! Two men! Jackie said, "I will never forget that firm hand that they put on my shoulder and them looking me in the eye. They changed my life."

Welles Crowther. He was six years old on a Sunday morning right before his family was going off to Grace Episcopal Church in Nyack, New York, as they did most every Sunday morning. And it was on that Sunday morning that his dad handed him a red bandanna, and he taught his six-year-old son the difference between a bandanna and a handkerchief. A bandana is not a handkerchief, but it's a *totem*. It's something for you to have and hold and remember who you are, so you, Son, might never forget. Welles never did. He carried the red bandana with him always. He put it under his lacrosse helmet and under his hockey helmet. He had it with him always. And he had it with him in his pocket on that day of September 11th in the South Tower of the World Trade Center on the hundred and fourth floor when the plane hit the building. And Wells reached into his pocket and he found the bandanna and he remembered. He remembered who he was and he ran downstairs and saved Janet's life and June's life and countless other lives that day.

It was 10 years before Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the bus [in 1955] that Jackie Robinson was court-martialed as an Army Lieutenant for refusing to move to the back of the bus himself. Now the driver of the bus said, "If you don't *move*, I'm going to cause you are a heck of a lot of trouble!" And Jackie yelled right back, "I could care less what you are going to do!" It was that same kind of gumption that he had that day in the opening game of the World Series, standing there on third base. And he said later, "It was a *foolhardy* thing to do! A *crazy* thing to do. You know, when you're down by two to try to steal for home. But," he said, "I wanted to risk something. I wanted to shake something up. I wanted something to move!" And he made something move that day: He made a game move forward. He made a country move forward.

Here's the deal. For most of us we live our lives like this. We live weighing decisions. "What should I do?" What are the pros? What are the cons? What should I do? We weigh things out. We think what is most reasonable and responsible, and we make our decisions. But the people like Jackie Robinson and Wells Crowther don't do that. They ask a different question. They ask, "Who do I want to be?" Who do I want to be? And they are blessed that they have had people that have inscribed upon their hearts the memory of who they are and who they are called to be.

Look. Let's not mistake ourselves that it's just all about sacrifice. No. . . . Sometimes maybe yes, as it was for Welles Crowther that day who lost his life saving people at the South Tower of the World Trade Center. Sometimes remembering who we are and who we are called to be calls us to the greatest sacrifice of all. But it is something more than that. It's something more.

You know that day that Jackie Robinson stood there trying to decide what to do and make the dash for home, on that day it was a little bit too little and too late; they lost the game. But here's the thing. His taking the risk in running for home instilled his team with a passion, with the drive, with an energy that they went on to win the Series. So there we are. It all comes down to us for *this* moment and *this* time.

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And here they are: Jesus, yes, Jackie, Welles – looking out at all of us reminding us with the poet, the yes that is required is not the "yes" that knows everything for certain. It is not the yes that says "yes" to what is but creates the possibility for *what might yet be*. The yes that is required steps forth into a new road wild and unfinished and says, "Here is my entirety, here is my soul."<sup>2</sup> And it is that "Yes," the Creation – all of it – sings out and responds to in a way that changes everything.

Happy homecoming. Happy homecoming.  
Remember who *you* are. Remember who *we* are.  
And let's help each other find our way home.  
— Amen

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Transcribed by Beth Bartholomew from [www.universityucc.org/Sermons/2016/11/30/2016](http://www.universityucc.org/Sermons/2016/11/30/2016)

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### <sup>2</sup> The Yes That Is Required

The yes that is required is not the yes  
of knowing anything  
for certain

it is not the yes that confirms what is  
it is the yes that  
creates something new

The yes that is required is the yes  
that steps forth into lands  
unformed and wild  
and says here is my entirety  
here is my soul

It is this yes the universe answers  
in ways that change  
everything

— Ann Betz, from *Coaching the Spirit*  
Eccentric Spirit Publishing (October 11, 2011)