

Christmas Day - December 25, 2011
The National Presbyterian Church

Best Supporting Actor?

Luke 2:1-7

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Those of you who have been in church recently may know that we're swapping things around today. The sermon is going to be shorter than usual. I'd promised it'll be no more than five minutes. I'm not sure I can keep my promise. And the children's time will be a little longer than usual, and it certainly will be. But I'd like us to turn our attention now to God's Word, and to think about this Christmas story that we've heard so often, and that we hear again, and we've heard again this Christmas.

I want to begin by mentioning to you some names - names with which you might be familiar, or you might not be familiar. I'm not particularly familiar with these particular names. The names are Jennifer Connelly, Marcia Gay Hardin, Jim Broadbent, and Benicio del Toro. Do you know those names? Know what they have in common? Some of you may; some of you may not. I see some nodding heads. They have something in common with Meryl Streep, with

Frank Sinatra, Tim Robbins, Morgan Freeman, and Cate Blanchett. They're all movies stars, but they have something else in common. And that is they have all won Oscars in a particular category. And that category is Best Supporting Actor or Actress. Every single one of them, whether you know their names or not, they've risen to the pinnacle and they've received that reward. And some of those names, we do know. But some of those names that have received the Oscar, we don't know. They disappear, as it were, into the background. But nevertheless, they reached the pinnacle. They did what they were supposed to do, and they did it very, very well, indeed. When you go to the movies, I don't know if you sit through the movie to the end, and then sit through, as all the names of everybody who was involved in the movie - the list comes down afterwards. My wife and I in recent years have been doing that when we go to the movies, and we, along with a half dozen other people are there when the whole place is empty. The script goes on and on and on. There are hundreds of people involved in these movies. And especially, I remember with "The Lord of the Rings" the list went on and on and on and on - hundreds and hundreds of people involved, just so we could see the movie, and just so a handful of people could be the stars, so that they could shine. Lots of people in the background; hundreds of people in the background so the story could be told, and a few people could be the stars up front. In all of those

cases, these people playing an essential, a vital supporting role, so that somebody else - so that somebody else, could shine.

One of my favorite movies is the movie, "Rudy". I don't know how many of you have seen "Rudy". It's getting old now, but it is one of those movies you could show to your family or to anybody, and there's nothing embarrassing that happens in the middle of it. It's a great story. It's about a young man, Rudy Rudiger, who wants to go to play football for Notre Dame. And even if I tell you the story, it's still good to watch it; I'm not giving anything too much away. He wants to go and play football for Notre Dame. But he's not a student. His teachers tell him he's not a student. He could barely get into college; he can't pass his exams at school. He goes to a community college. He works his heart out, and he pleads with people to let him into Notre Dame. It's a true story - pleads with them. And in the 70's, he transfers in. And he wants to get on the football team. But he can't, obviously, get on the main football team. He joins what's called the Scout Team. And the Scout Team are really the pieces of meat that the rest of the team eats up as they practice. They're the dummies who are there so that the main team can run the plays and prepare for the real game. And they just put themselves in the way of these huge people, so that they can shine. And that was fine with Rudy. That's all he wanted to do - to be on the Scout Team, to help

Notre Dame win their games. And there's one memorable scene where he plays so tough in his position, that the big guys on the team say to him, "Lay off. Pull back. You're playing too tough. You're not on the team." And he looks up at them and he says, "If I don't play my game like this, you cannot play to win." And they back off. And they begin to realize that he is playing his heart out so that they can shine as stars. At the end of the movie, there's a touching scene, and this is true, where they finally let him dress up. And he's on the sideline. And in the last moment possible for eligibility, they pull him into the game. And the whole place erupts in cheers of, "Rudy, Rudy, Rudy!" I've seen it many times. You can see it as many times as you like. It's still as touching every time you see it. And if you haven't seen it - it's just a great, heartwarming story.

But how powerful to live your life so that others might shine. Now, when it comes to the Christmas story, I don't know who you would give the Best Supporting Actor Award, the Rudy award to, in this story. There are lots of supporting groups in the story. So there are the angels; they're sort of like the commentators there. Then there are the Wise Men. They're sort of like the international community that gathers around the baby and the manger. Then there are the shepherds, and they're like the ordinary people - so that all kinds of people are involved in this story. But they don't give this award to groups.

We're looking for an individual who might be the Best Supporting Actor. We might think of giving it to Mary, but Mary is really sort of one of the stars, as well. She gets the Best Actress Award there. And Jesus, of course, is the star of the whole show. If I were to give the Best Supporting Actor Award, I think that I would give it to - wait a minute, let me open it up here. The award goes to Joseph.

To Joseph. Yeah, the murmurs from the crowd. Joseph. Some people are disappointed, but it goes to Joseph. And why does it go to Joseph? Because of his role. What is his role? Basically, the angels come to him and say, "Don't mess it up." That's it. "Don't mess it up." I mean, "She's pregnant, it's okay; God's involved. Don't divorce her. Don't put her to shame. Just don't mess it up. And it's not your job to give him a name. We've got a name for him. His name's gonna be Jesus. It's not gonna be Joseph, Jr. It's gonna be Jesus. Just don't mess it up." And he says, "Okay," because he wants the light to shine somewhere else. And then, don't forget that other part - that he, he is going to have an enormous impact on this baby who is going to change the whole, wide world. Wow. What a supporting role that is. I think - I don't care what you think - I think he gets the award. What a job - to be in the background. Actually, we only see him in the birth story. We're told his parents, by the way, Jesus' parents go when Jesus is 12 to Jerusalem. But if remember correctly,

Joseph's name is not there. He disappears from the story after that. Maybe he dies young. Maybe Jesus helps rear his brothers and his sisters. But his role there is of enormous importance. "Just don't mess it up. Don't interfere. Let the light shine on another."

Many of us are looking for our role in life. Only a few people can ever be the stars that shine. There are always hundreds of people in the background, enabling others to shine. God has placed one person on this Earth, and it is the job of every single one of us to allow Him to shine. And here's the paradox - that when Jesus shines through our lives, we shine, too. We find meaning and purpose in pointing the light on another. How wonderful it would be if, when we meet God face to face, he looks at us and he says, "I know you." I also know, and I don't remember them so I've got to read - Jennifer Connelly, Marcia Gay Hardin, Jim Broadbent, Benicio del Toro. "I know you. You get the award. You, too, along with Joseph, are a Best Supporting Actor or Actress. You knew exactly what to do to make my Son shine." And at that very moment, I think our faces would shine, too. May we all receive that award and find our joy on this Christmas and in the days to come, in playing that role in this great drama of life.

Let us pray. "Holy God, we bow before you. We ask that you would, indeed, use us to this end; that we would be pleasing in your sight, and that your light

would shine through us, onto your Son, that he would be honored and glorified. And in this, that we might all find great joy. Amen.”

We’re going to be singing now. Please remain seated. And as we do so, the children here in the congregation, come and join me down here. We’ve got some places where you can sit down here. But let’s sing God’s praise.

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