

Chapel Talk  
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*Fear and Faith*

When I was in high school I often thought about what “adulthood” would look like and what that phrase meant. In my mind, adulthood seemed to begin shortly after college somewhere in your early 20’s and it was a time when all of the hard work and preparation from the previous 17 or so years of education would finally begin to pay off. At that point in my life, once I had overcome all of life’s major obstacles in high school and college, I’d finally be in control, independent, and fully equipped to handle anything life threw my way. Adulthood was a destination that represented a state of experience, wisdom, and understanding of life.

As I entered my senior year of high school, I had a great plan for success. I had a great group of friends, good grades, and I was captain of the soccer team. My high school guidance counselor produced a list of potential career paths for me based solely on my math SAT scores and I graduated high school armed with a full scholarship to the University of Delaware for Civil Engineering.

Spoiler Alert: St. Andrew’s employs exactly zero civil engineers on its faculty.

It was the week before I left for college and the soft whispers of doubt that I had been able to ignore and plan around the previous year had become louder and louder in my mind: “I wasn’t prepared” - “I wasn’t ready.”

I thought that the previous 18 years of life was supposed to make this transition to independence smooth and seamless, but it hadn’t. I wasn’t ready to leave home and take care of myself. I wasn’t ready to be at a large university with thousands and thousands of students moving in all different directions. I wasn’t ready to be handed the keys to my life and have this much control over my successes and failures.

But despite all of my fears and trepidation, I went to college and began trying to fulfill my destiny that I thought was becoming a civil engineer. After the first semester, I could tell that something was wrong. My heart was being called in a different direction but I didn’t know where to. I knew I needed to make a change so I switched from engineering to biology, still uncertain if it was the right decision. However, it came at a cost and forced me to give up my scholarship and delayed graduating a year. The decision I made to follow my heart didn’t make my life easier, in fact, it made it much harder with a lot more work involved and long

hours. I took classes in the mornings, began an internship in the afternoons and took part time jobs in the evenings and weekends to make ends meet.

One of the jobs that I had during that time in college was working security for a local restaurant establishment. In other words, I was a bouncer at a college bar. This was not a job option that came up in the conversations with my high school guidance counselor and the job application never asked me anything about my math SAT's. As I have a low tolerance for conflict and drama, this job was not well suited for my personality, but at the time, it was the only late-night job I could find that didn't conflict with my daytime schedule. My life was really busy and having a schedule that began at 8 AM and ended at 2 AM made every day feel like a constant uphill climb. During the rare moments when I could finally sit down and collect my thoughts, I'd ask myself, "How did my plans get so off-track? If God truly had a hand in my life, then how in the world did I end up here, working 16-hour days, struggling to get by and in over my head with a future that seemed so unclear?"

After working at the bar awhile, management decided it wanted to hire its first female bouncer. The first and only applicant was a criminal justice major with a 4.0 GPA that wanted to go into Federal Law Enforcement and while she was only 5 foot 2 she could bench press 185 lbs. She had a smile that could light up a room and a captivating personality but if you got out of line at the bar, she'd put you into a wall. Over the next few months of working together we became great friends and there were many times that I told myself, "You should ask her out" but a voice in my head kept saying, "no way, this woman is waaaay out of your league." Eventually (and I say this with both great pride and definitive proof of divine intervention) SHE asked ME out, and next May we will celebrate our 20-year wedding anniversary.

My wife and I have the kind of relationship where when I introduce her to people and say, "I'd like you to meet my wife, Shara" that the person looks at my wife, looks back at me and kind of squints, then looks back at my wife and tilts their head and I can tell what they are thinking. Does this woman have the wrong eyeglass prescription? Did Al used to be taller? There is actually a sports phrase borrowed from football that describes this phenomenon. It's called "outkicking your coverage". In football terms, it describes when a punter who normally kicks a ball 45 yards or so out of the blue just gets ahold of a punt and sends the ball 65 or 70 yards and the coverage can't get down the field fast enough to cover the ball.

In relationship terms, "outkicking my coverage" means I am blessed to be with a woman who is smarter, stronger, tougher, more attractive, and better than me in every way. I've known it from day one and every day

since I have been challenged and inspired to be a better man because of her. In fact, there is a strong membership to the “St. Andrew’s faculty husband I Outkicked My Coverage Club” and while I don’t want to name any names, Mr. Roach has been a proud member for 44 years.

So along with being a bouncer, I also had a job working as a tech at a physical therapy clinic. After I became certified as an athletic trainer I continued working at the clinic full-time but still held 2 other jobs to pay the bills. One afternoon, the clinic received a phone call from Bob Colburn, the athletic director for St. Andrew’s. The school needed an athletic trainer as soon as possible and wanted to know if the clinic had anyone interested. I came to the campus, interviewed, and within a few days, began working my fourth job. The job was part-time and my plan was to work at St. Andrew’s for a year or two, build my resume, and move on to bigger and better things. Besides, I had my doubts that this new setting was a good fit for me because I wasn’t sure if I would connect well with teenagers.

On my first day of work here, I was setting up my office at the start of the winter season of 1997. I think I had only been in the office a few minutes when a student ran in and frantically said, “Someone is hurt on the basketball court.” I ran down to the court to see a girl with long brown hair and braces sitting on the floor, hunched over, and struggling in pain. I asked, “What’s wrong? Where are you hurt?” In between gasps of air she said, “I can’t breathe.” My initial thought was “Wait! This is supposed to be an ankle or a knee! She can’t breathe? Now I’m having trouble breathing!” But in that moment, I pushed those thoughts aside, remembered my training, and talked the girl through it. After her breathing became normal again, we joked and laughed and she thanked me for being there for her and from that moment, I was hooked.

I spent the next 2 decades experiencing and living the highest highs of seeing athletes achieve things they never thought possible while also seeing them experience the lowest lows of defeat, injury, and self-doubt. Through it all, it has been an honor to stand shoulder to shoulder with the best community of students in the world and make some of the most powerful connections of my life. In fact, 22 years later and I am still friends with the basketball player with brown hair and braces from that first day of work. Bernadette, thank you for being here tonight.

So while I was a young husband and getting my footing on a new career at St. Andrew’s, my wife and I began to plan a family. I was adamant. I wanted 2 kids. She wanted 3 kids.

Eventually I compromised and we had 4 kids. The first 3 came all at the same time. I remember feeling completely unprepared and unequipped to handle not only the job of fatherhood but of a father of multiples as well. Shortly after the triplets were born and in the middle of sleepless nights and a constant, driving schedule of caring for the kids, my wife realized as she tried to go back to work, that the schedule of a federal law enforcement officer and a mother of triplets didn't match. So she left work to be at home with the kids. In the blink of an eye, we went from a family of 2 with 2 incomes to a family of 5 with one income. We struggled to make ends meet. Two intelligent, hard-working, college educated people in their late 20's filled with hopes and dreams found themselves on food stamps and staring into a scary and unknown future. During that time it would have been so easy to let life break us, break our relationship, and break our spirit. Instead, we decided to double down on our commitment to one another, hold onto our hope and our faith, and wake up every morning and give the day everything we had for the sake of our family.

There is no stronger realignment of your core values than when you are forced to stop focusing on the brand name of your clothes, the kind of car you drive, or the square footage of your house and you instead look at a table of food, surrounded by people you love, in a warm home and you feel truly and deeply thankful for what you have. These changes are powerful and they are permanent.

When I look back, I see that the scariest moments, the most uncertain moments, the moments where I didn't feel ready to carry the load, all became the greatest blessings, experiences, and moments of growth in my life. "For God does not call the equipped, He equips the called."

Perhaps you are an upperclassman in the midst of the college process with all of the pressures and uncertainty of creating a successful future. Perhaps you are a new faculty member who has moved to this new community in Middletown and are trying to mentally digest the enormous and overwhelming amount of information that has been given to you over the last 3 weeks.

Perhaps you are a new student here at St. Andrew's and between the hectic schedule of leaving home, meeting new people, square dances, and classes you find yourself in a moment of quiet reflection where the voices of doubt begin to creep in and you ask yourself, "Am I ready for this?"

I can tell you, you were not called to St. Andrew's because you ARE ready, you were called here to GET ready.

Our transformations from who we are to who we are meant to be many times stands on the other side of fear and uncertainty when OUR plans fall apart, but we are willing to take a leap of faith on God's plan, put in the work, and fight every day for what we value and what we love.

So as some of you begin this time where you face the unknown in your life, I want you to promise yourself that you will have faith. But don't have faith on who you think you are, what you think you know, and how prepared you think you are to have all the answers as you go on this journey, have faith for the person you'll become because of it.