



Sam Dibrell

June 24, 2011, St. Anthony de Padua Church

My name is Michele. Steven and I are Sam and Hannah's godparents. How wonderful that we are here together today in such great numbers to celebrate the Love that is Samuel. People connecting with each other in love is what Sam is all about.

We might begin by asking, "What's in a name?" Well, "Samuel" is a Hebrew name that means "God hears" and in the Bible, the young Samuel was awakened from sleep by the voice of the Lord calling, "Samuel, Samuel!" to which he replied, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening!" (Or, as our Sam would say, "We ready!") And the scripture says, "Samuel grew up, and the Lord was with him, not permitting any word of his to be without effect." So the biblical Samuel was a great Communicator for God who made a huge impression on everyone he met. Sounds familiar, right? How fitting is our Sam's name! It was no accident.

In these past few days, we've all been sharing our personal stories and memories of Sam---so many experiences that reveal so many facets to Sam's beautiful character and larger-than-life personality. We could never do him justice in the few moments we have here; we can only gather up some common threads of this life that was such a gift to all of us. You know, Sandy has said that her Sam lived life so intensely that one day for Sam was more like 3 days for a normal person. Being a mathematician, she figured that in 22 years, Sam actually crammed at least 66 years of living. As Hannah said, Sam "lived up" Life...and as one of our Catholic saints has said, "The glory of God is a person fully alive." That's Samuel!

We knew from the day Sam was born that he came to teach us, that in some way he was here as "Teacher." His capacity to "go for the gusto" in Life and wring every ounce of joy and adventure from a day happened from the start---and it was EXHAUSTING! Sam approached everything with unbridled enthusiasm and excitement. As hard as he played, he worked, and as hard as he worked, he loved, and whatever he felt he felt and expressed intensely and sincerely, with his whole heart and every fiber of his being. As a little boy, Sam had a Jesus doll---a cloth doll with a red heart that looked like Jesus and was almost as big as Sam was. Sam loved on that doll, laughed on that doll, cried on that doll, slept and drooled and dribbled and spilled on that doll until it was a filthy, grimy mess. I think Sandy tried putting it in the washing machine a few times, so worn out was the doll by Sam's intense childlike love and reliance on the Sacred Heart of Jesus, especially when he was upset or hurting. (Now there's a teaching for us, if we have ears to hear . . .)



and grief we feel, the way for us to not only survive Samuel's death, but to gradually grow larger in our acceptance and become "wider receivers" of it, gaining from it a new kind of Love relationship with him---one that is more real and more present to us than his physical nearness could ever be. A relationship with Sam in the "Communion of Saints," as the Church calls it, where we can continually communicate with this amazing person who has, in so many ways, majored in "communications" throughout his 23 years of drawing people together. We can trust that Sam is not done communicating with us; he's just getting started. And now he has no restrictions of time or space to prevent his including everyone, with no one left out.

And so it happened that this past Monday---a clear, bright, sunny summer day in south Texas---something happened. And then Samuel heard his name called: "Samuel! Samuel!" And in my imagination I hear Sam saying, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening!" What wonderful new adventure do You have for me? Are You going to make me an offer so spectacular I can't refuse? And when he saw the splendor and beauty of the Love coming toward him, Sam enthusiastically opened himself wider than ever before to receive it. He was not caught off-guard as if by something strange, but said, "We ready!"because Sandy had taught Sam the most simple and important mathematical formula: "God is Love, and God is Everything, so Sam is Love." He was simply receiving the fullness of the Love that he is. Pure Love, pure joy.

And so it was, is now, and ever shall be: Sam in us and us in Sam, in the eternal Love of the Trinity circulating through all Creation, in which we are all immersed at every moment of our lives. We have only to open wide our eyes and ears and hearts to receive this Truth.

As we leave here today, we honor Sam best by imitating him: by living our humanness intensely, including our grief and sorrow....but never allowing this or any other loss to close our hearts to the Love that is God, or to the beauty and wonder of Life. As "wide receivers," like Samuel, we let Love in and we keep it flowing back out to the world, moment by moment.

On behalf of Sam's family, thank you all so very much for being Present with your love and support. We count on your love in the days to come.

Michele Maxwell, Sam's godmother



As Sam got older, he excelled in sports and emerged as a major competitor and a winner. But he was never mean or vicious. In fact, Sam seems to have lacked all capacity to be harsh, cruel or unkind to anyone under any circumstance. Though he was a powerful competitor, Sam was truly a LOVER, not a fighter. He could not endure movies that were violent or bloody or scary. Rather than watch them with his tougher little buddies, Sam would just walk outside and wait, not caring what anyone thought. He simply couldn't bear seeing people deliberately hurt. This "allergy" Sam had to cruelty applied to all areas of life. As he got older, Sam was repelled by any kind of discrimination, never agreeing with those who would exclude someone simply because they were "different" in some way. Sam had a highly refined sensitivity to other's feelings, a deep compassion and empathy, especially for those outside the dominant group. He wanted everyone to be included and no one left out or marginalized. Sam always thought of the person that everyone else had forgotten about, and reached out to that person. Because he focused on our shared humanity rather than on differences, Sam was comfortable with anyone, of any status or persuasion. His heart knew no boundaries. (Here's another teaching for us, if we have eyes to see)

Sam's "rock-star" status exploded, of course, in the football years. The years when so many incredible friendships were forged within the Alamo Heights community, among both parents and kids. Much has already been said about Sam's amazing athletic skill, but let's consider again the importance of a name. Sam was a "wide receiver." That was his position on the football field, but more importantly, it was Sam's position in Life: "WIDE RECEIVER." Sam had an understanding, on some deep, gut level that Life is God's Gift to be received. It is indeed a WIDE gift---bigger and broader and grander and deeper than our capacity to grasp onto. God's Life in us is an Ocean of Love and we have a coffee cup or maybe only a thimble with which to receive this ocean. Sam knew the secret: that the more OPEN his heart and mind could be toward Life, the more Love and beauty and goodness he would receive.

And so Sam was open-hearted and open-handed, generous almost to a fault and willing to give whatever anyone needed. As Hannah said, Sam did not worry about saving money; if he had it, he wanted to spend it and enjoy it with others. Yes, Sam had champagne taste, no matter what the budget, appreciating high quality in everything. He especially loved him some fancy shoes, from the little green rain boots he wore in pre-school to the Cole Hahn loafers and Five-Fingers toe shoes he wore last weekend. He was a "fashionista" in many ways, and it made him smile. Of course, his favorite outfit cost very little: boxer shorts and that lavender head-scarf---Sam was nothing if not secure in his masculinity! Whether cooking, gambling, golfing, "bartending," playing with Pearls and Mia (the family pets), or pursuing the more serious business of his job in the county courthouses, Sam was just perfectly "Sam" in all things, with that dazzling ear-to-ear grin that---as Gio said---brought "sunshine" into every room.



Along with material things, Sam also did not believe in “saving up” or hanging onto grudges, resentments, fears, worries, jealousies, or sadnesses. He told Hannah, “Life is too short” to be negative in any way, when there is so much positive to be received. This attitude and openness made Sam’s life a beautiful exchange of Love that flowed between him and everyone he met. (Yet another teaching for us, if we have ears to hear)

After two seasons of college football, Sam found that his stretch for receiving Life’s goodness was expanding; he knew it was time to reach further. He wished not to be defined or identified only by his football success, but to move on, into a much larger arena of “wide receiving” in the big world that awaited him beyond the stadium. In this transition out of football, Samuel had to lead the way for those of us who had a little difficulty letting go of the “sports hero” image of our boy. There was naturally some resistance to Life changing, growing, evolving---which is what Love does to anyone who’s open to WIDE RECEIVING. But Sam was our Teacher once again. With integrity and grace, he straightforwardly explained, without excuses or hesitation, the change to which he was being called. Yet he did so with humility, courtesy and gratitude for all he had learned from the sports experience. Sam’s forthrightness, the courage of his convictions, and the confidence in his own Inner Light are, again, a teaching for all of us as we face

Life’s many invitations to change direction and keep growing.

With his usual joy and excitement, Sam recently began to dive into the world of work, “chomping at the bit” to finish his college degree this December and devote himself to full time employment in the same field as his dad, Brad Dibrell---the person Samuel loved, respected and cherished above all other men in the world, as his role model and best friend.

In so many ways, Sam has taught us how to live and challenged us to become “wide receivers” of Life. Life in all its goodness and love, and also its occasional pain and suffering which serve to break our hearts open wider. In these past few weeks, in a most mysterious and beautiful way, it seems as if Sam has been unconsciously preparing us for this moment. Again I have to ask, “What’s in a name?” Over and over in recent days, Sam has been bringing Faith to his loved ones, intent upon introducing us to Faith and making sure that we get to know Faith independently of him, in our own personal relationship.

Am I referring to this beautiful young woman whom Sam loved? Yes I am. But Faith’s name is no accident, either. It serves as a reminder to us, from Sam, that our FAITH is the way through this sorrow