

Date: Sunday, July 2, 2006 (Pentecost 4/Proper 13)

Text: 2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27

Location: Zion Lutheran Church, North Battleford

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Grace and Peace be unto you from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Today in our Old Testament reading, we heard a story about a young King David- well, actually King David isn't "king" yet.

When I think of a young King David, one word immediately pops into my head- Goliath! I am sure many of here recall the story of David and Goliath, after all it is a Sunday School favourite.

In this Old Testament story of heroism and bravery we hear of how the young shepherd-boy David picked up a small stone, placed it in his slingshot and killed the evil feared Philistine giant, Goliath.

When are called to remember David's bravery and assent to kingship, it is most likely this story of David and Goliath that we envision. And no wonder why, it's a great story! But, it's not the only story that shows the bravery and power of this would-be-king...

Before David became king, he faced another "Goliath" of sorts. While this Goliath was not a Philistine giant, he was nevertheless a powerful figure. However, unlike the original Goliath, David never hurled a stone in anger at this figure, even though he had many opportunities. This new 'goliath' that David faced was no other than the present King of Israel himself, King Saul.

You see, from the start, God was never too sure about this whole "king" business, but allowed the children of Israel to move from being led by "Judges" like Samuel, to become like other nations and be led by a "king." It would appear that the Israelites had a bit of a "wandering eye", so to speak. They would look across their borders at their cosmopolitan neighbours, and say to themselves, "Yeah, those people over there have it going on, how come we can't be like them?"

Eventually, God gave into their request to be ruled by a king like other lands and Saul was anointed by Samuel (whom was former judge and great prophet) to be the first ruling King of Israel. It would appear that Saul wasn't a bad king, as kings go. However, Saul made his mistakes along the way, and as time went by, "power" got the better of him (as it often does even today). Saul forgot what God wanted. At a certain point God, who was 'iffy' about such things as "kings" from the start, said "enough is enough," and pulled back from Saul. Scripture says, "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him." (1 Samuel 16:14)

And it here, that David and King Saul cross paths...

According to Scripture (1 Samuel 17-18), David first met Saul when Saul was "troubled by an evil spirit". David had a reputation for playing soothing music on his stringed instrument. Saul soon discovered that this beautiful music that David could play brought him some comfort and relief. However, an ironic thing about this relationship was that the one who brought Saul relief from whatever plagued him, was the very one who was, in a way, causing his fits.

Now here is where it gets even more interesting. Unknown to Saul (who was always worried about losing his grip on power (remind you of any politicians today?), his replacement had already been anointed by God. And who was this replacement? No other than that shepherd-boy with a slingshot himself: David, son of Jesse.

Well, David met his original Goliath and defeated him but, as time went by, Saul became more fearsome a Goliath to David than that Philistine ever did. Saul soon grew suspicious of this young man with a guitar in hand. It got downright nasty at times. On a couple occasions Saul, during some of his fits, wanted so badly to grab a spear and nail David to the wall that he actually tried. By the grace of God, I guess we should say, David managed to miss getting skewered. He had to run away many times. Of course, there were also days when Saul was apologetic and repented of his evil desire, truly wanting to embrace David in love.

True, the relationship between David and Saul became one of competition and anger- but it was also one (at times) of friendship and love. Consider what David says when hears of Saul's (and Jonathon's- Saul's son/David's closet friend) death:

17David intoned this lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan. 18(He ordered that The Song of the Bow be taught to the people of Judah; it is written in the Book of Jashar.) He said: 19Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places! How the mighty have fallen! 20Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon; or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice, the daughters of the uncircumcised will exult. 21You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor bounteous fields! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, anointed with oil no more. 22From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, nor the sword of Saul return empty. 23Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. 24O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you with crimson, in luxury, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. 25How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your high places. 26I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. 27How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

(2 Samuel 17-27)

Even though David and Saul found themselves in competition, they still respected each other- one could even say they loved each one another.

How do we respond to the Goliaths or Sauls in our own lives? Do we want to pick up a stone and hurl at them in anger? Do we rejoice when they fail?

Hopefully not. Hopefully, we remember that while we might (at times) see the world differently than our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are all loved and sustained by the same Father, that is our Lord God.

David had many worldly reasons to despise Saul and dance on his grave. But he didn't. David realized who Saul was- that he was a child of God, a king anointed by the Lord.

Here in the church (whether we are talking about Zion Lutheran Church, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada or the whole Christian church universal) we would do well to remember that we are all one in the body of Christ- that we are all children of God.

God takes no joy in our failures, our sinfulness, or our pains- so why should we? Like King David we are called to respect and honor all of God's creation, whether or not we want to share a dinner table with them is another story!

Consider what the Apostle Paul writes to us in Romans (Romans 12:14-21): 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Will we always succeed in loving our neighbours? No. Will we always be able to love our enemies? No. And those times that we fall short of the glory that God desires for us, we need to turn to both God and our neighbour and seek forgiveness.

And thankfully the same God who reminds us to love our neighbours also loves and forgives us. Through God hearts are renewed, sins are cleansed, and relationships are restored.

I have witnessed this in the lives of others and I have experienced it myself. Swords might kill kings and stones might slay giants, but only the power of God can renew a person's heart.

Amen