

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10 “A King’s Promise”

Every now and then folks ask me if it’s hard to write sermons. And of course the answer is, “some are harder than others.” Here’s how the process usually works. A month or two ahead of time, I come up with a preaching schedule. Sometimes I have to go away out of cell phone and e-mail range to get this done. I look at the lectionary and see what kind of scriptures are offered for the weeks ahead. I read all the scriptures, think them over and ask, “What does this scripture say to *me* and does it apply to the ministry needs of the *congregation*?” That’s where the Holy Spirit comes in. Sometimes I go “off lectionary” and preach on something that’s been on my heart. Or I’ll have a little revelation like I did a few years ago and think, “There’s only two times in a six year cycle that the Book of Daniel ever appears in the lectionary. I love Daniel! He’s the Batman of the Old Testament,” so I work up a series and go from there. In both cases, I take notes on each of the texts and then when Briony reminds me that the deadline for the *Caller* is near, I come up with sermon titles for the next month. And because I set last Monday and Tuesday aside for planning, I now basically know what I’m going to preach about up through September. Unless of course the Holy Spirit intervenes to change plans which happens on occasion. And that’s a good thing.

Anyway, as far as the day-to-day things go, Monday is when I start thinking about “what question am I addressing this week” or better yet, “what is the *disconnect* this sermon is going to address?” From there, I lay out what we publish on social media for the week because it’s important to post something every day that encourages people to come to worship on Sunday. And those posts have to deal with the week’s theme, so on Monday, I need to know enough about what I’m going to preach for the next Sunday to move forward.

Tuesday is when I have to even harder about what I’m preaching because I need to get an e-mail out to our worship leaders, elders and musicians so they’ll know what to expect. By this point, I have to know

what my conclusion is going to be too. This, of course, requires some prayerful study too.

Wednesday is when I start blurting the sermon out on the computer. This is where it either flows or doesn't. When it does, it's great. When it doesn't, it's frustrating. Writer's block is no fun.

Thursday I meet with our worship crew for breakfast. If I had a great writing day on Wednesday, I basically tell them, "This is what I'm doing Sunday." If I had a bad writing day, I might ask, "So ... does anyone have any ideas?" Then I go back to the office and finish it.

Friday is my day off. I don't touch it. That is unless I didn't finish it on Thursday. Saturday night I practice. It usually gets marked up with a red pen because I realize that even though it looks good and makes sense on paper, I need to make sure it makes sense coming out of my mouth. On Sunday morning, I have two more run-throughs, and maybe a little mark here and there depending on how it flies in first service, and then it gets preached.

This is all to say preparation is important. Even preachers who sound like they're preaching off the cuff or who don't use notes have put in a lot of preparation time during the week. And again, some weeks are harder than others. That being said, this week's sermon *wasn't* very easy because it required using a method that I'm not used to, but I had to turn to in order for anything to make sense.

So today's scripture takes place during a crucial turning point in the history of King David. It comes a couple of years after the death of King Saul. The nation had split in two. And although God had *promised* that David would rule over *all* the tribes of Israel, only two of the twelve had accepted him as their King. The other ten decided to crown Saul's remaining son, Ishbaal as King. But then Ishbaal was assassinated, and there were no more descendants of Saul left except for an infant grandson. There was no obvious leader to take the throne in Israel, and

so the elders were desperate to avoid descending into power struggles and feuds that tend to happen during power vacuums like this. So they came to the conclusion that the wise thing to do was to patch up their differences with the two southern tribes and ask David to rule over them too. This all sounds like something out of Game of Thrones doesn't it? I love it.

Now here's where careful study of the scriptures comes in handy and where I had to step out of my comfort zone as far as approaching the scripture goes. One of the methods that has been used for interpreting the Bible down through the years is known as "typology." An example is when we say that the crossing of the Red Sea is a "type" or a "model" for baptism. Or that Abraham's attempted sacrifice of his son Isaac is a foreshadowing of the death of Jesus. When we do that, we're using typology to interpret the Bible. Some biblical scholars don't like using typology, because when it's misused, it sounds as if the crossing of the Red Sea or the sacrifice of Isaac meant absolutely nothing until they were "fulfilled" in Jesus' ministry. That's why I'm not crazy about it. It's lazy scholarship and diminishes the importance of the Old Testament. But when "typology" is used responsibly, it can give us some wonderful insights into patterns in the way God operates, and patterns in the ways people respond to God over the centuries which helps us understand things better. When we compare these patterns to one another and let the different examples illuminate each other, we can learn a lot. That's what I liked about that Bible study series Tommye Jean did a few years ago. It highlighted the interconnecting themes of the Bible and showed how these 66 books fit together. Now I tell you about this, because what I'm about to give you is a typological interpretation of this story that Nina just read.

Let's use typology to compare King David of Israel and Jesus, who we call "Lord" and "King." This story is a good example of how we can see a common pattern between two accounts. The people of Israel tried their best to function without David because if they turned to him for help they'd have to give up some old resentments and rivalries. In the

same way, people try to do without Jesus, because they realize that they can't follow him *and* hang on to their prejudices and divisions. But finally, the people of Israel turned to David and asked him to be their king because they couldn't hold things together without him. They had to trust this promise that God made to the people about David or else chaos and violence would consume them. They were desperate. In the same way, people often turn to Jesus when things start to get out of control ... when things look desperate. What's that Carrie Underwood song? "Jesus Take the Wheel?"

So the image of this shepherd king is a classic example of David/Jesus typology. In this story, the people remind David of the *promise* made to him by God: "It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel." So as far as the story goes, we've followed David all the way from shepherding his little flock of sheep in the fields of Judah to being shepherd of the whole people of Israel. When the Gospel Writer John called Jesus the good shepherd, it would have been crystal clear to his readers that he was making a comparative reference to King David. Jesus isn't the kind of king who rules by force and lords it over his people, but one who tenderly leads and cares for them ... as God promises. The Israelites were saying this about David in a hopeful sort of way. Jesus, on the other hand, has already proven his credentials by laying down his life for his sheep. See the pattern? God promises to send a leader who will lead God's people like a *shepherd*. That's the way God works. But the people try to avoid this kind of leader, and then they eventually recognize their *need* for that kind of leader and get on board.

Okay, now let's take a closer look at the idea of "covenant" or "promise" in this comparison. In the story of David, the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them before God, and then the elders anointed David king over Israel. What sort of covenant would this be? What kind of promises would be made? What are the details? Well, that's where we run into a road block because there are no specific details about the covenant! The ten tribes

of Israel were virtually on their knees begging David to step in and become their king. He doesn't especially need them, but they need him. If he's going to agree to take on all the extra work and responsibility of ruling over twelve tribes instead of just two, he needs to know the terms and conditions. He needs to know what he's getting himself into. And so do those 10 other tribes! So the covenant is about spelling it out. It defines what the king can expect from the people and what the people can expect from the king. By taking on this responsibility, David places himself in front of the rage and hostility that would consume the people of Israel if they continued to war against each other. In other words, he saves his people from destruction.

How does this work when we compare this with the story of Jesus? Well ... we use the word "covenant" every week when we talk about our relationship to Jesus. Every Sunday we hear his words: "This cup is the cup of the ... ? *new covenant* in my blood ... poured out for you." Jesus promises to nourish us with his own self-offering. By placing his own body in front of the world's rage and hostility, he saves us, his people, from the destructive chaos that would otherwise consume us. And every week when we accept that bread and cup, we are giving our "yes" to the covenant. We're keeping our end of the promise to our Shepherd King.