

Hopkins South Monterey

United Methodist Church

Affecting Lives Through Jesus Christ

Scripture & Sermon

June 27, 2021

Pastor Kelsey

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27

1 After the death of Saul, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag.

17 David 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:

19 Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places!
How the mighty have fallen!

20 Tell 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.

21 You 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.

22 From 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.

23 Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely!
In life and in death they were not divided;
they were swifter than eagles,
they were stronger than lions.

24 O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,
who clothed you with crimson, in luxury,
who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

25 How the mighty have fallen
in the midst of the battle!

Jonathan lies slain upon your high places.
26 I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
greatly beloved were you to me;
your love to me was wonderful,
passing the love of women.
27 How the mighty have fallen,
and the weapons of war perished!

Prayers & Sermon

*God of love and grace,
Thank you for this time to be together. Thank you for this time with you. Bless this time
we have to spend with your Word. Help us to hear what you know we need to hear, and
help us to put what we learn about you and ourselves into action. In the name of the
Son and Spirit, Amen.*

The last 3 weeks we have been focusing on God at Work. Skipping our way through 1 & 2 Samuel we have read about Israel asking God to anoint them their first king, God leading Samuel to David who will be the second king, and last week, David trusting God's presence with him while taking on Goliath. Through these familiar and less familiar stories, we reflected on the ways that those stories of Israel's history show us God at Work in various grace-filled ways. So far we discussed how God responds, God Sees, and God leads. This week, we skipped by a lot of soap opera level drama between Saul, David, and Jonathan and get to hear the piece of scripture that tells us of the end of their relationship. Though we will be focusing on the lament that David shares, it will make the most sense if we understand why David is lamenting Saul and Jonathan.

So let's take a glimpse into the soap opera. I won't be sharing all the details, so if you are interested in reading more, their story starts in 1 Samuel 18. Saul first became acquainted with David before the Goliath episode as David played music in Saul's court, that did well in soothing his terrible moods. David met Jonathan after the battle with Goliath. Jonathan was Saul's oldest son and was known as a courageous warrior. He had also just returned from victory in battle when David was invited to see Saul after he beheaded Goliath. Scholars estimate that David was about 18 and Jonathan was at least 10 years older. So, it is here they meet, and Jonathan takes an immediate liking to him. 18:1 says, "18:1 "As soon as David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan's life became bounded up with David's life, and Jonathan cared about David as much as he cared about himself."

Soon after David and Jonathan met, the two men became close friends, and expressed their commitment by making a covenant with each other. In some ways, this was like

them declaring themselves as closer than friends, perhaps brothers. The dramatic moment is described in 1 Samuel 18:3-4: "Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt." Jonathan giving him those items of clothing is a nod to Greek warrior traditions, as a symbol of their commitment.

After the action of the battle with Goliath and the drama of David and Jonathan meeting, David goes on to lead Saul's army to battle, with victories that bring all of Israel and Judah to love him.

1 Samuel tells of the ups and downs of David and Jonathan's relationship over the next 15 years. King Saul is jealous of David's popularity and keeps trying to kill him, while his son Jonathan rescues his friend in various ways. Saul spirals and becomes more and more unstable as his jealousy and desire for vengeance grow. David once looked up to Saul and that is repaid with betrayal and being hunted. Meanwhile, David spares Saul twice throughout their dance.

Throughout the years, David and Jonathan became so close that it looked like someday they would rule Israel together. But that day never came because Jonathan was killed in the same battle that Saul ended up falling on his own sword to avoid capture. They both died and that brings David to the throne. As he ascended the throne, David mourned deeply for him with the famous lament that we read today.

This lament is significant for a lot of reasons. In the big picture, this lament is an example of David's character. David easily could have hated Saul, David easily could have been glad that Saul was dead, David easily could have criticized Saul for all his failures to God and his people to make himself look good, David easily could have been thrilled to finally get to take his rightful place as king. There is a lot that David could have done with his new power as king in his first days, a victory lap would not have been shocking. He does none of that. He spends time at the very beginning of his kingship lamenting the loss of his mentor and friend. David does not ignore the bad, but does spend time recognizing the positives that Saul did and lamenting the loss of the good in Saul. This lament shows David's character for grace, love, and friendship.

The title of the song of lamentation that David sings is most often translated as "The song of the bow." But due to some translation and transcription inconsistencies, the title could also be translated to "The song of hard things." This seems like a bit more appropriate title for a song of lament. This alternate title is a reminder that spending time lamenting, mourning, no matter how complex or convoluted a relationship is, is an important hard thing to do.

Another hard thing addressed in the song is the complexities of war. It is not all this glorious, victorious thing, but leaves behind sadness and strife. War, not just on the battlefield, but in the interpersonal field as well, breeds jealousy and vengeance, and brings loss to many. David laments what the "victory" of his getting the throne means as it comes at the price of the loss of his beloved friend and childhood hero.

David spending time in lament as one of his first acts as King is a powerful moment in and of itself. But it could have been a private moment that he kept to himself. Instead, he makes his song of lament public and invites everyone to join in it with him. And remains as public as it could be as it was immortalized in 2 Samuel. This means that it is an important moment and one we are meant to learn from.

David's lament here is a window into a practice that we as Christians aren't always very good at. It is easier and happier to focus on the hope of resurrection and the celebration of the good times had. We don't like to sit in the sadness and accept time in the dark space of mourning. We all experience grief, but we don't always take the time to mourn. To clarify, grief and mourning are not the same. Grief is the emotion we feel, while mourning is the act of grieving or processing the grief, working through it.

David models for us a form of mourning, lament. Lament is the expression of grief or sorrow, often through words in song or prose, but it could also be through non-verbal forms like music or dance. David lamentation shared with us is a song. In modeling lamentation, David also gives an example of how grief can have a place in the life of faith and among faith community. The text says David "intoned his lamentation," meaning he sang it out loud. He did not shy away from sharing the depth of his grief out loud among his community. He shows us through his song the importance of pausing and naming our losses. Not just saying we are grieving or belittling the specifics, but naming the specific losses. He doesn't explicitly say it, but by sharing the details, by naming the losses he felt at the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, David encourages us to do the same. Naming our losses requires us to acknowledge all of what we are feeling. It does not allow us to sweep something under the rug or deem something as unworthy to be grieved. Naming our losses acknowledges that all forms and level of loss deserve space to be recognized and processed.

David's lament speaks to a few types of losses that he was grieving as part of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. Obviously he is naming the loss of these loved ones, as the primary loss. But David also sings of economic loss as he repeats "how the mighty have fallen." King Saul and his son, Jonathan, were "the mighty," the ones on whom God's people depended for security and strength. The loss of those figure heads and leaders is a major economic loss for the kingdom. David also speaks to the loss felt by creation; in verse 21 he reminds us that even mountains and fields bear witness to it. Loss can change the way we experience or think about creation. Perhaps with questions like how can the sun still rise and shine so brightly without this person here? David reminds us that all of creation, as an interlocked system, shares in the interruption of life that loss brings.

After the year and a half we have all had, we have all become more familiar with how much grief can come from losses that we probably wouldn't have seen as grievable losses before now. Everyone has experienced loss of all kinds during this pandemic. Yes, some seem to have lost more or have losses that we may deem as more significant, but the fact remains, that we have all experienced loss: Connection to loved ones, economic, daily life and routine, plans and events, church community and faith practices, mental health or self care, and even just simply time. The losses have been many for all of us, we all have held grief in our hearts this past year.

Grief, complicated and all consuming like David shares in his lament is a bit more in reach for us after this season. I am sure that all of us had at least a moment when the grief became overwhelming, perhaps not even fully consciously, but a moment when you felt there was too much darkness around, when it felt like everywhere you looked was more loss. Perhaps you felt tense or felt like you just wanted to scream it out. That is where David is when he shares this lament song. His grief becomes palpable as he shares it and asks the people to mourn with him.

Like David, we, too, must spend time acknowledging the losses we experience and making space to mourn or lament the grief as we ease back out of pandemic times. Everyone, myself included, is all too excited to get back to “normal” to wear a mask less and less, to gather with friends and family again, to invite people into our homes, to sing together and worship together. David reminds us to not charge ahead too quickly into the victory or celebration, but to take the time to recognize the loss that comes with any major transition like this. We have all experienced so much loss that this year and a half has been and could continue to be very traumatic for all of us. This is not a time period that we will easily forget. If we do not spend the time to remember the losses, recognize the grief and give ourselves space to mourn, we will continue to carry those losses with us where they can grow and weigh us down. A positive of all of us experiencing this loss is that we can then mourn together. We all have experienced very similar loss this year, so there is no better time to share the burden of grief with others, so we can mourn together and carry the burden together and find the light on the other side together. When we share the load, it becomes easier to handle.

This text is important to read and be reminded to take the time to grieve. But it doesn't only take us down into the dumps and leave us with nowhere to go. This moment of lament is just a piece of the greater story. Though David's lament takes us into the depths of grief, we also know the truth of where he goes from there. David's story testifies that new life will emerge from those depths. Yes, there is the deep loss and grief in Saul's death, but at the same time it makes way for the next season in Israel's life. The grief and new life coexist side by side, neither lessening the other. It is simply the all too often necessary way of things that there has to be an ending for there to be a beginning. Saul's death opens the way for a time of growth for God's people. We know from later in the history that a new, united kingdom will flourish under David and his dynasty. Through the testimony of David's life, God promises us that new life comes from the low and dark moments. Barbara Brown Taylor writes, in her book *Learning to Walk in the Darkness*, while reflecting on Jesus's resurrection, “If it happened in a cave, it happened in complete silence, in absolute darkness, with the smell of damp stone and dug earth in the air. Sitting deep in the heart of Organ Cave, I let this sink in: new life starts in the dark. Whether it is a seed in the ground, a baby in the womb, or Jesus in the tomb, it starts in the dark.” Grief and loss often put us in dark, small, closed off places in our minds and hearts. Often it takes us some time to emerge from those dark places. And that's okay. Taylor says later, “I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is really only one logical conclusion. I need darkness as much as I need light.”

This is where we find God! This is where it matters most where God is. Not victory or conquest or triumphalism. But in the moments and spaces we are sitting in that dark, growing and learning and processing, before we make it back into the light. God holds us in our grief and is saving us even when we still feel surrounded by darkness.

These days as we face the losses from the pandemic, and all the horrific injustices and inequities, and the seemingly constant stream of devastation of humanity, not only in faraway places, but right here in our own backyard, the darkness of our sufferings and need to lament remain present.

It may be hard to see, but we can trust, that as God was working through David, God is at work in and among all of us, saving us from grief by being right beside us in the darkness. God does not want us to spring back into the light before we are ready or pretend we are in the light when our hearts remain heavy with grief. God saves by being with us in the lowest moments, helping us and encouraging us to mourn so that our grief can be processed and lightened. God saves by bringing others to mourn alongside us and share the load. God saves by giving us community where we can be vulnerable and ask them to hear about our losses and share in our grief. In the moments when we sing the songs of hard things, may we turn to God and our community alongside us in the darkness and be saved, accepting the love and grace of God to sustain us until we can venture into the light again.

Let us pray.

*Loving God,
let your word speak to our hearts.
Come and heal our brokenness
and restore us to life.
Comfort our grieving hearts.
Teach us to share from our abundance.
By your word,
transform us into your holy people. Amen.*