

Hopkins South Monterey

United Methodist Church

Affecting Lives Through Jesus Christ

Scripture & Sermon

July 7, 2021

Pastor Kelsey

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10

5 Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Look, we are your bone and flesh. 2 For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The Lord said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel." 3 So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel. 4 David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. 5 At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.

9 David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inward. 10 And David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.

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.*

God is at work! God responds, God sees, God leads, God saves. As we have meandered our way through the part of the Israelite history told in 1 & 2 Samuel, we have heard of a being anointed and then fired, of a shepherd boy being chosen as the next king, of that same young boy stepping up to the plate to defeat a great warrior, and of how that shepherd boy mourned the loss of his friend and role model as he ascended the throne. Those very human stories also tell us of the ways that God was at work among and through Samuel, Saul, and David.

This is our last week of the series, today focusing on how God unites through these few verses from 2 Samuel 5. These handful of verses act as a bit of a transition between major events in David's story, as the text wraps up the era of civil war among the tribes of Israel that followed Saul's death. At the time the kingdom was made up of multiple tribes. Saul had been king over all of them. After his death, the tribe of Judah accepted David as the next king and anointed him. Meanwhile the commander of Saul's army brought one of Saul's son to another major city of the kingdom and instated Saul's son as king over the rest of the tribes of Israel. Unsurprisingly, David and Saul's son were quite the rivals and war broke out. As the war went on, David's power grew stronger while Saul's son weakened. The people began to turn against Saul's son and more unrest. More war intrigue happened and eventually some of David's army assassinated Saul's son, and even though David disapproved of their methods, it did end the conflict. This is what brings us to our passage this evening that starts with, "All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron" and proclaimed David as God's chosen king.

Though we only read 7 verses, there is still a lot being said. The first verses give us images of power and which are the ones that we should support. Verse 2 continues the elders of Israel's declaration to David, "For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The Lord said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel." They contrast Saul's relationship to power against David's, describing Saul's leadership as "king over us," or power of brute domination. Whereas David's leadership is described as being a shepherd of the people, one who led out Israel like a flock to feed, and brought Israel in like a Shepherd brings in the flock at night for safety. David's power is based in caretaking, guiding the flock of Israelites to nourishment and protection from danger. And even more so, as the elders of Israel proclaim, David's power is not his own, but God's that he is steward of it on behalf of God's people. Since David is the chosen king of Israel by God based on his inner qualities, particularly the values instilled through his years as a shepherd boy. David is chosen above the brutish, visually appealing King for his leadership qualities, for the way that he stewards power for caretaking and not dominion. If that is the kind of leader God specifically chose, perhaps this is a window into how God holds power: not through coercion, fear mongering, or force, but like a shepherd. God holds power in nourishing and protecting God's flock, as Jesus emphasizes in his ministry. Our God is a God of caretaking power, not violence and forcefulness. We should look to leaders that hold to God's values of power, power should be gained and maintained through true care and concern for those affected by that power.

The next verse tells us of the kind of effect that kind of power can have on those under it, as the elders of the recently divided tribes of Israel all come together to instate David as king. The elders and Israelite people had come to see that David rules as a shepherd over all, and not just the favorite few. David gave them proof of his commitment to the full collection of the tribes of Israel by making a covenant with them. David started his kingship on solid ground by recognizing the importance of being a leader for the people and not just for glory and power. Saul's power of domination led to division and

infighting. David's power as a shepherd to the people brings unity. His shepherd leadership was the kind that the people were drawn to, what they followed, and what ultimately helped them put aside the recent conflict. The tribes of Israel came to see the value of caretaking over domination, and came to see that unity for the sake of that caretaking leadership is more important than the things that divided them before.

David, the chosen king by God; David, the leader who recognizes God as the source of his life; David, the shepherd who finds his identity and security in God, is the one whose leadership brings unity of the tribes of Israel and Judah. Through David, God united the people for years of flourishing and growth. God continues to unite us through spaces where caregiving is the focus of leading people.

The moments in our history that we celebrate as ones of unity are those where caregiving was the motivation. The civil rights movement unified African Americans across the country as well as brought in active support from other groups. We have seen in wartime the ways that the people come together to fight against oppressive forces or unite with the common cause of caring for our troops. This past Sunday we celebrated 4th of July, a grand example of a time when the American people united against a country and government they didn't see as shepherding them. 4th of July still acts as a holiday that unites our communities as we celebrate together, eat together, and play together.

We see how the power in caregiving unites through community projects, things like community gardens, mission projects, support groups. When the care of others is the goal or task, people come together despite differences. I think of the way the Food Pantry unites the Christian community here in Hopkins, bringing together workers and donations from our church and the reformed church to care for those who need extra help providing food for their families.

We become divided as the focus of leaders shifts to power by domination and greed. The American civil war broke out as the confederacy wanted to hold onto the power and economic benefit of enslaving people. World war 2 broke out as Hitler worked to expand the German empire and exterminate Jewish people. In more recent history we have seen our country become more and more divided as our politicians have become more about strengthening party lines instead of addressing the needs of the people. The pandemic became a divisive and contentious thing as the discourse became more about the effects on the economy and personal freedom instead of caring for the entire flock. In general, power by domination and greed divides us more and more through the systems of oppression that are allowed to flourish. Power by domination and greed fuels poverty and racism, bigotry and exclusion.

God wants us to be united and God is uniting us when we let God work through us to lead as God would lead, and hold power as God would hold power. Now, it feels important in divided times like these to clarify that unity does not mean that we agree on everything, or hold all the same beliefs and opinions. Unity doesn't mean we are all bestest friends, braiding each other's hair and sharing our deepest secrets. Unity means that we, like David at the beginning of his kingship, commit to working together to care

for all people above all and that we can put aside our differences so that caring can take precedence.

David may have been called to be the leader of a kingdom, but leaders can be found in all situations. They need not be official or publicly announced or anointed, leaders are anyone who people look to for guidance. As God called David the shepherd boy to be King, God calls us to be shepherd leaders in our community.

Being shepherd leaders, focusing our power on caretaking, is not just some hippy dippy call to “love, man!” or be a pushover. Being a leader like a shepherd means both nurturing and managing, caring for the most vulnerable and guiding the greater flock to bring about the most flourishing. Shepherd leadership means comforting and challenging to do better, means protecting the vulnerable and holding all accountable. If we are to be shepherd leaders to our community, we need to look for ways that we can actively engage in that work. David learned to be a shepherd and then apply that to his leadership of people by putting in the work. We have seen from the last few weeks that David did not just become the trusted and anointed shepherd king of Israel overnight or for no reason. David is able to rise to kingship and be trusted to bring healing and unity to the nation of Israel because he had built up to that throughout his young life. Before the moment in today’s scripture where David is anointed by the tribes of Israel, and even before David had been previously anointing king over Judah, David had long been working up the trust of the people. He had already built a foundation of relationship with the people, starting in his days as a court musician for King Saul, then with his grand defeat of Goliath that continued in years of military success under Saul’s rule. David built relationships with the elders and leaders of Israel throughout that time, gaining their favor. Through those years he had shown them a history of good leadership that had a positive impact for the people. Lastly, through the ways he treated the deaths of Saul and Saul’s sons, as well as the people of the tribes of Israel throughout the civil war, he had shown that he put the needs of the greater community before himself and his own tribe (Judah). David was chosen and anointed by God to be King, but he was not just magicked into the position. David accepted the call by God and put in the work to get there. We must do the same. God calls us to the shepherd leadership, to unite and care for the people, so we must do our part to work to that position in our communities.

We, as the church, must build a foundation of relationship with our community, not just through name recognition, but through true interaction. That means we have to actually be out in the community. This past Sunday, spending time in the park sharing our name and root beer floats was a great start to that. But we must continue to follow up on that, being present in the community and doing more than just giving away a free cold treat on a hot day. As we put in that work, we should not expect to suddenly become much more popular, but remember that we need to build a history of good leadership. Each piece of community leadership we do now may not look like it has a big effect in the moment, but it plants seeds that can grow into a great trust later. Lastly, as we continue on the road of that work we must remember to act for the needs of the greater community and not just our internal needs.

I am proud to say that we are already putting those ideas in action in little ways. We have multiple ways that we engage with the community as a whole to build a

relationship: the community meals I have heard so much about, the mentoring program, senior meals, the stocking stuffer free store around Christmas, the trick-or-treat stop, and hosting the Hopkins Food Pantry. We have ways that we share a bit of who we are with our community and have a chance to get to know the community in return. What can we do to continue to grow on that familiarity to create an even stronger foundation of relationship?

The new Being Brave Ministries group is a great example of the ways that our church is striving toward being a good leader in the community and creating that history of good leadership. The projects that are being dreamed up and worked on with that group are ones that are focused on the real needs in our community and the ways (big and small) that we can do something about them. I also see in those projects the ways we are recognizing the needs of the community as much as our own needs. For example, our congregation doesn't have any youth right now, but in hearing about the marginalization and exclusion of youth from other spaces in town, we are working toward creating a safe and inclusive space for those teens to be teens and have community together.

When we follow through with God's call to be the leaders like God called David to be, shepherd leaders, caretaking leaders, we include God in our work. God reminds us through this story with David, that that kind of leadership, acting on that kind of power, is what can unite us. God works to call us toward that kind of leadership so we can experience the love and peace of that unity. When we listen and work with God, we can unite and create our own city of David, our own Jerusalem, our own spaces where the care and guidance of the whole flock is the main concern.

Let us pray.

God, keep our eyes and hearts open for the ways and places we can be shepherd leaders. Help us keep our hearts and minds centered on power by caretaking instead of power over others. When the task is big and our leadership will be noticed by others, may we build relationships, plant seeds of trust, and look for ways to care for all and not just some. And God, keep us faithful in little things. When the task is so small that no one will notice our work, may we still do your bidding. When a smile, a touch, a word could bring sunshine to someone's life, shine through us. Help us to be worthy of your trust in us and the trust of those in our flock; through the grace of Jesus Christ and the inspiration of the Spirit. Amen.

