

Written Copy: 2 Samuel 18:31-33 “This is My Son: Ishmael”

Midweek Advent #3

Wednesday, December 14th, 2022

Text: 2 Samuel 18:31-33

³¹ And behold, the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, "Good news for my lord the king! For the LORD has delivered you this day from the hand of all who rose up against you." ³² The king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" And the Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up against you for evil be like that young man." ³³ And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Exegetical Statement (the text's context)

David's forces have gone out to fight against Absalom's men. David has given specific instructions to his generals to deal kindly with his son. But Joab, when he encounters Absalom stuck in the branches of a tree, kills him. Then Joab sends a non-Israelite convert, a Cushite, back to report the outcome of the battle and that the rebellion is over. But one of the sons of the priest loyal to David also wants to report in and ends up outrunning the Cushite. He arrives and reports that the LORD David's God delivered over those who were in rebellion. But when he hears David only ask if his son Absalom is OK, he lies and says he doesn't know. Then the Cushite arrives and tells David not only is the rebellion over, but when asked about Absalom tells him "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up against you for evil be like that young man. And David is moved to inconsolable grief. He leaves the gate, not remaining to welcome the troops home and thank them, and instead loudly weeps for his son crying out for all to hear, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I have died instead of you"

Focus Statement:

David loved his rebellious son Absalom so much he wanted to take his place in death. Jesus loved rebellious us even more. And as David's greater son did take our punishment by hanging on the tree that was the cross. As the Savior who is also God, His suffering and death was sufficient to pardon not only me in my rebellion, but all humankind. And He gives me this pardon and the ability to trust my life upon it through His gift of faith.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We may not have organized a political coup, or sought our earthly father's life. But when we disobey our Lord's commands, we commit insurrection against Him. We pull Him off the throne of our hearts and install ourselves. For that reason, we deserve the same judgment that fell upon Absalom eternally

What the hearer should do as a result:

Believe and hold fast to the complete pardon we have through faith in Christ, that no matter how badly we rebel in sin against the Father, His Son our Savior has earned complete pardon for us. And through the work of repentance, He comes and installs Himself back on the throne of our hearts where we are to live in service to Him and His forgiving love toward one another.

Subject Sentence: Christ pardons the eternal death due my insurrection

Introduction: Parents Making Sacrifices for Their Children

As most of you know, becoming a parent means you begin to make sacrifices. When the baby comes along, the needs and desires of mom and dad have to take a backseat. Right away there is the sacrifice of time, the time you used to be able to sleep. Babies don't wait for your alarm to go off in the morning to be fed or changed. You can no longer just pack up and go on vacation like you used to. And some of the things and pastimes that you used to enjoy have to be set aside to fulfil your role as parent. And then there is money that has to be set aside to buy what is needed for now, and to save for their future. The sacrifices parents make come in all sizes. Some are the little things that show our love for our kids, like giving up your favorite piece of dessert so that they can have one. Some are life choices like giving up a career to stay home and care for them. You have done this for your children. In how many ways did your parents make similar sacrifices as they raised you?

And what parent doesn't want to take their child's place when they get in trouble and face punishment? What parent, who is sitting beside the sick bed of a child who is seriously ill doesn't long to take their place if they could? And God forbid, what parent, if their child got in trouble with the law, and had to watch them being marched out of the courtroom to jail, doesn't wish they could take that child's place. The problem is, in all these things, we cannot fulfil that desire to suffer in the place of the child whom we love. Such was the case for David and his son Absalom

David's Sacrificial Love for Absalom

Absalom was as difficult a son to love as they come. We start his story with what David's eldest son Amnon did to Absalom's sister. David had many wives, eight of which are mentioned in the Old Testament. Amnon fell in love, or perhaps the better word to describe it is "fell in lust" with his half-sister Tamar, Absalom's full sister. Amnon, heir apparent to the throne, used his special place and privilege to get Tamar alone with him in his room, and he raped her. And if that isn't bad enough he kicked her out of his room and out of his life instead of doing what was right and marrying her. No longer a virgin, she was destined to live destitute in her brother Absalom's care. Absalom burned with anger over what his half brother did. But since Amnon was heir to the throne Absalom didn't feel her could act on his desire for revenge just then. But he spent two years plotting it.

His time came when it was sheepshearing time, a festive time when the men gathered together in the fields away from Jerusalem and celebrated and partied with food and drink. Absalom invites his eldest brother Amnon, makes sure he gets drunk, and then orders his servants to execute him.

Then Absalom flees to avoid the punishment he deserves for murdering his brother, and goes into exile in the town where his mother came from, across the Jordan River. He stays for three years. Meanwhile, after David finishes mourning for his eldest son, he mourns the loss of Absalom to exile. Finally, the commander of David's army, Joab, talks David into letting Absalom return home. David agrees, but will not allow Absalom to live in the palace, or present himself there, or dine with the royal family. This disgrace before the people of Jerusalem angers Absalom more than being in exile. He calls on Joab to speak to his father on behalf of him but Joab refuse to even come meet with him. Finally, Absalom gets Joab's attention when he sets fire to his field which is adjacent to Absalom's. Joab then speaks to David, who allows Absalom to appear before him. Absalom bows before his father and kisses his hand, with a show of remorse and repentance that moves David to allow him back into the palace.

How does Absalom repay his father for this gracious and merciful act? How does he repay the king for not punishing him but welcoming him back into his midst? He begins his work to steal the hearts of the people away from his father and his rule. Absalom is a charismatic and striking young man with thick and long flowing hair, maybe something along the lines of Fabio back in his day. Absalom would ride around the city in a chariot with fifty men running after him in a spectacle of pomp engineered to draw attention to himself. He would sit at the city gate and act like a politician on the campaign trail stumping for voter support. He would greet those coming into the city. He would shake hands, give compliments, kiss babies, whatever it took. To those who were coming to have a judicial case heard before King David, Absalom would ask them about it. And no matter what the merits of their case was he would agree they deserved justice. But, he said, unfortunately, King David has no one that will hear your case and give you the justice you deserve. He would tell them, 'If only I were king...' And these actions had the desired effect so that many of the people began to fall in line behind Absalom.

After four years of this politicking and scheming Absalom is ready to make his move. In a show of false faith and piety he asks his father's permission to travel to Hebron, where the tabernacle still stood, to fulfill a vow he made while in exile. Hearing his son was going to worship the LORD David gladly agrees and lets him go. But secretly Absalom has sent messengers out into the kingdom telling them that when the trumpet sounds people throughout the kingdom should declare "Absalom is King at Hebron".

When David hears of this, and hears Absalom and his supporters are marching back to Jerusalem, rather than see his beloved city destroyed in a civil war, he and those loyal to him flee. He leaves dressed in mourning, and praying the LORD would frustrate the works and plans of Absalom, but not kill him. He prays that if it be the LORD's will, he be allowed to return one day.

When Absalom arrives in Jerusalem, he secures his position as the sole king by taking David's concubines and making them his own. This effectively severs the avenue for reconciliation with his father. Then he sets out with his army after his father intent on killing him and thus securing his reign and rule over all Israel. He follows David and his men across the Jordan River to the town of Mahanaim where David and his loyal soldiers are. As David sends his men out to engage in battle he tells his generals, including Joab, the commander of the army, not to harm his son Absalom.

David's men draw Absalom's army into the forest near the city. Absalom's army may be greater in number, but they lack the experienced soldiers David has including a Green Beret like detachment of Mighty Men that will protect David to the death. The forest helps work to David's advantage and Absalom's army suffers defeat. As Absalom tries to flee on his donkey, his long flowing hair gets caught up in overhanging tree branches and he is pulled from his donkey and left suspended in midair. When Joab comes along and finds him hanging there, disregarding David's command not to harm his son, Joab thrusts his spear through Absalom and kills him.

This effectively ends the rebellion. Joab chooses a non-Israelite, a Cushite, to return to the city and tell David the news of all that happened: the victory of his soldiers and the death of his son. Another man, Ahimaaz, the son of the Priest who is loyal to David, wants to be the one who (he thinks) should bring the good news of the end of the rebellion to David back in the city. But Joab suspects that this might not actually be good news and sends the Cushite instead. But Ahimaaz out runs him and encounters David waiting at the gate. He shares the story of victory. But he senses the depth of David's concern for the well-being of his son, and his love for him despite everything, and wisely decided not to share the detail of his death.

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The Cushite believes that David will be overjoyed with all the news from the battle. The Cushite sees this as great news, the rebellion is over and the man who led it, who was trying not only to steal the throne from David but kill him is dead. But David doesn't see things the same way.

2 Samuel 18:33 And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

David enters into a deep state of grief and mourning, and it will take some hard words from Joab to shake him out of it. Despite all Absalom's plotting, and all he tried to do to his own father when David's was gracious and loving and forgiving towards him, David still loves this errant son so much he would be willing to take his place in death. Some of that comes from the natural grief that a father would have over losing his son. But by his actions David knows that Absalom died without faith. David knows that because of this he will not only no longer see Absalom in this world, but he will be lost for eternity. His love for his son is so great David is willing to give the most precious thing he has to offer, his life, to have Absalom back again, and not just for now, but through the same saving faith David has, for eternity.

Jesus' Sacrificial Love and Action for Us

That sacrificial love that David had for Absalom points us forward to the "Greater David" that was to come. The very one who posed this question to the Pharisees in our Gospel Lesson (**Matthew 22:42**) "**What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?**" **They said to him, "The son of David."** That son of David is Jesus Christ. He came to do what David was unable to do. He came to give His life to save all who would be lost forever.

Now you may not have committed treason, or tried to murder your earthly father. But you have a Heavenly Father, who created you and sustains your life. You and I every day commit treason in our thoughts, words, and actions. We do so whenever we disobey the King of Kings expressed command that we love God and love one another, and do so sacrificially and unconditionally. As Jesus, the King of Kings said in **Matthew 15:19-20a** **19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. 20 These are what defile a person.**

We deserve the same punishment and eternal death that Absalom suffered. But the Greater Son of David interceded for us by giving His life on the cross, hanging on a tree, suffering the wrath of God over our sinful rebellion. Jesus, being a human being like us, stepped in and took your place, taking your punishment. And being the Son of God who is also the Son of Man, He could and did make full pardon for every sin you have ever committed or will commit. And not just yours, but for every single person that ever has lived or will live. He did that out of love, His love, a love greater and stronger than even David had for Absalom.

It's a love that powers the continued work of cleansing you have been given in your Baptism. It's His gift of faith and forgiveness that is at work every time you confess your sins and hear the words of absolution. The Devil loves to speak into your ear words of condemnation. But by faith, the Holy Spirit speaks a better word; "***The suffering and dying for your sins is finished! You are completely forgiven. And because of your faith in the Greater David, eternal life awaits you.***" Your baptism has declared you to be a precious child of God now, who lives with you now and works to keep you in steadfast faith unto eternal life to come. His gift of love to you.

Conclusion

Our parents made sacrifices of love for us, and even though we rebelled against them in some way, shape, or form-not always obeying them, they forgave us. Our children have rebelled against us when they were disobedient, yet we forgave them out of our great love for them. Like Absalom did against his father David, we have rebelled against our Heavenly Father. But with a love and forgiveness that surpasses even that which David had, our Heavenly Father forgives us, His beloved children, based on all His Son, the Greater David has done for us. He took your place and died your death, and earned for you eternal life that He gives to you through His gift of love, the gift of faith given in your Baptism. It's the gift we can share with others as we forgive them as He has forgiven us; not to be saved, but because we have such a great gift of salvation from Him. Amen.