

June 27, 2021  
Rev. Kerry Smith

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27      Lead Where You Are: David  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

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New Revised Standard Version

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

David intoned this lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan. (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: Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places! How the mighty have fallen! 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. 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. 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. 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. O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you with crimson, in luxury, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your high places. 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. How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

I want to invite us to begin with a breath prayer written by Cole Arthur Riley of Black Liturgies. As we inhale, let us pray I can belong to joy. On our exhale, I will not hide from hope. I can belong to joy. I will not hide from hope. I can belong to joy. I will not hide from hope. Amen.

We have been looking at the earliest leaders of Israel— Samuel, Saul, and David. God was their king, but the people wanted an earthly king. Samuel warned them about earthly kings. Our preacher a few weeks ago, Wes Allen, reminded us that kings take. They take your sons and make them soldiers and servants in the palace. Kings take your daughters and make them cook and clean for the king. The people didn't care, they wanted a king, so Saul became king. He quickly became consumed with worrying about holding onto the throne and his power. In the end death came for Saul as death comes for us all. It is the one truth in life we cannot hide from.

One of the days of the church year that I love the most is Ash Wednesday. It is the one day that we in the church acknowledge the reality of our mortality. We are all going to die. We can't run from it; we can't hide from it. On Ash Wednesday we receive the ashes from the previous year's Palm Sunday leaves on our forehead in the shape of a cross as the pastor says these words to us, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." God created us from dust, and we will return to dust. We can't escape the reality of death.

In the scriptures today we heard David grieving the death of people he loved, Saul and Saul's son Jonathan. David and Jonathan were close, like really close. The Bible says that Jonathan was knit to the soul of David and they loved each other. Like really loved each other. We just heard David say his love for Jonathan was more wonderful than his love of women. Now, David's partner is dead.

David grieves publicly and passionately, and he teaches Israel to grieve. He orders his lament of grief to be taught to the people of Judah, to be written down for public record. We don't usually grieve that way. We treat grief as private and personal, and we share it with only a very close circle of family and friends. But grieving in public is David's first act as Israel's new leader.

Last Saturday was the memorial service for the daughter of one of our church members, Dave Gibbons. Dave shared at the memorial service that he was dreading the day of the service. He said he wanted to hop in his car and drive far away. He is a private person and he was

speaking to a standing room crowd of family and friends. People who care for him and his family who showed up to give testimony about his daughter's life and the impact that it had. It's hard to grieve in public. But grief is important to us as people who have a life of faith.

Something terrible happens and we grieve. We have this onslaught of emotion, and then we mourn as we do the work of grieving. We experienced so many losses in the last year and a half. We are on this side of the pandemic, but grief is still there and we have to remember that the work of mourning is not over. I wonder if we have given permission to talk about our grief to ourselves and to others? We have been through trauma and that trauma will always be with us. We can't push aside our grief and say, we are back to normal, isn't that great?

Our scriptures today give us permission and space to acknowledge our grief. Church should be the place where grief and death can be faced for the painful reality that they are and where our human loss and grief can be voiced. Church should be a safe place where we can share what we hoped for when we are left despairing of justice or peace or hope. The brokenness of our lives and our world must be acknowledged and voiced. We can't move to joy, renewal, and praise too soon. We have to make a place for our pain. Our wounds can't heal if they aren't exposed. Church should be a place where pain and loss are acknowledged publicly and their power over us is broken. Church is a place where we remember that there is always healing out of brokenness and hope out of despair.

When I think of the moments in my life that really defined me, my stepdad's death when I was 17 tops the list. His death at that crucial time in my life taught me that life is precious, and inspired me to seek to do something in the world that makes a difference. What the church taught me was that we show up for one another. When my stepdad was life-flighted to the hospital after his car accident, my mom called the church. The pastor on staff called the choir director since my mom and stepdad sang in the choir. The choir phone tree was activated and all of these people from the church started to show up at the hospital. My stepdad was in surgery all night long and all night long these people from our church waited with us. No one knew what the outcome would be, and the church didn't run from death, the church stood right with us, beside death. The church said we are with you, you are not alone. God is with you, though you may walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil: because God is with us; God's rod and God's staff comfort us. God prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies: God anoints our head with oil; our cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives: and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

A few weeks ago we had in-person clergy session where all of the pastors from all of the Methodist churches in North Texas come together. We approve people for ordination and celebrate people before they retire, but the first thing that we do is sing a song that has been sung every year since 1780 when Methodists gather in holy conference. We are remembering everything that has happened in the last year as we sing, "And are we yet alive, and see each other's face? Glory and thanks to Jesus give for his almighty grace! What troubles have we seen, what mighty conflicts past, fighting without, and fears within, since we assembled last! Yet out of all the Lord hath brought us by his love; and still he doth his help afford, and hides our life above."

This last year we have been asked to do so many things and we have so little energy left. We have been exhausted and fired up. We have endured and lived through so much in this last year. We haven't yet sat with our grief or named our losses. Our losses have been many. Some mourn the loss of lives close to them. Some mourn the loss of lives taken in injustice. Some

mourn the loss of what life used to look like pre-pandemic. Some mourn what they thought life was like before they realized how blind their privilege had made them.

What is your first experience with grief? Grief has shaped my soul in ways that no religious program could ever touch. Grief gifts us. It may be difficult to embrace grief but without it we would not know the heartening quality of compassion and could not experience the full breath of love or the surprise of joy. We could not celebrate the sheer beauty of the world. Grief can be a teacher *if* we let it teach us. Grief can shine a light on what we truly hold dear because it is in grief and loss and endings that we truly know what life is. God comes to us in our pain with healing and grace. God restores life and hope. God offers the abundance of steadfast love. God brings peace to troubled souls.

God is at work even when we can't see it or feel it. God heals us in the secret places that we are afraid to look but look we must. New life awaits. May no one take away our joy as we await resurrection moments. Breathe in, breathe out. I can belong to joy. I will not hide from hope. Thanks be to God, Amen.