

July 4, 2021
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2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10 How Not to Lead: Mistakes Leaders Make
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10

New Revised Standard Version

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Look, we are your bone and flesh. 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." 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. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years. David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inward. And David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.

Today is July 4. I love this holiday because I love America but also because it is halfway through the year. It is a marker reminding me that I can start again. We heard a story of starting again as we hear about the beginning of David's reign. We have been looking at the earliest leaders of Israel. As we hear David's story this month, we will look at mistakes leaders make in hopes that we might avoid them.

David is now king of Israel. Remember when David was anointed when he was a shepherd boy? We heard in that story that David was God's king, not the people's. Israel is filled with hope with this new beginning, this kingdom will be filled with shepherding and covenant making. With David, Jerusalem becomes an important place, a holy place for the first time for the Israelites. It becomes the city of David. Before this, Jerusalem was a little city, just as David was the unpromising eighth son who looked after the sheep. It is God who makes something of Jerusalem and God who makes something of David.

There is an importance in place isn't there? God is with me when I stick my toes in sand and feel the waves on my feet. God is with me when I'm hiking in the mountains of Colorado or on the trails in Big Bend. A place reminds us of traditions and helps us sense God's presence with us. While we're in this special place here at Greenland Hills, I think of baptisms, Confirmations, and memorial services that have happened in this sanctuary. I think of us praying for people that were moving away. This place helps me sense God's presence while we sing together, while we sit in silence together in prayer, while we listen to beautiful music together. I think of graduating seniors being prayed for, of thousands of children who have sat on these steps during children's time. This sanctuary is a holy place that reminds us of God's story in the midst of our own story.

The story we heard about David becoming king is a story about a king, but it is also a story about God among us. Jerusalem was transformed into a vision of God's presence. Jerusalem became *where* God lived. This is a story of new beginnings, a story that reminds us we always need to be open to God's presence in our lives.

Sometimes we need a new beginning, don't we? We realize that we have become everything we were trying to avoid. There may have been patterns we were trying to break and we realize that we have become those patterns. We hurt people we love, we realize that we have not been present for people, and we become okay with how things are. We accept that this is as good as it gets and we are too afraid to do the hard work of looking in the mirror and beginning again.

That wonderful word that we use in church 'repent' means to turn around, to make a 180 degree turn. You are walking this way, and you decide you want to change, you want to open your heart more, you want to forgive yourself, so you have to turn around, you have to repent.

The Greek word for repent in the New Testament means to change one's mind. We have been headed down a path and we have to turn around and go the other way.

In Brene Brown's book *The Gifts of Imperfection*, she talks about engaging in our lives from a place of worthiness, cultivating the courage, compassion, and connection to wake up in the morning and think, "No matter what gets done and how much is left undone, I'm enough." It's going to bed at night and thinking, Yeah, I'm imperfect. Today was a mess. I'm vulnerable, I was afraid a lot today, but that doesn't change the truth that I'm brave, and I'm also worthy of love and belonging."¹

If we are willing to say no to fear, if we are willing to do a 180 degree turn, if we are willing to turn toward God and acknowledge our need for God, then we have the opportunity to be a part of the work that God is doing. As a leader we have to be open to God's vision that is more expansive than we could ever imagine.

We also need other people to hold us accountable. Brene Brown talked about the importance of giving feedback as closely to the time of an event as possible. She said it's not unusual for her to walk out of a meeting and have someone say to her, "Hey, it's okay to be mad and frustrated, you need to watch rolling your eyes when other people are speaking." And then Brene will say, "Oh, no, did I do that?" The other person usually says, yeah, a couple of times. Brene thanks them for the feedback, and goes back to the meeting. She shares with them that she received some feedback that she was rolling my eyes, and she apologizes because that feels diminishing and it can stop people from sharing. She shares that she is committed to changing that behavior. Full stop.² In James Clear's book *Atomic Habits*, he says, "We don't rise to our highest goals. We fall to the level of our most broken systems."

Brene Brown says we can choose courage, or we can choose comfort, but we can't have both. Not at the same time. We can resist change or we can accept and embrace it. In the face of change we are called to be open, collaborative, and curious about the future and what's possible.³ Are we ready to step out in faith?

In the world of Harry Potter there are three curses deemed to be unforgivable: curses that cause mind control, torture, and death. These can send someone to Azkaban, which is the wizard prison, for life. Nadia Bolz-Weber has a podcast called "The Confessional" and she talks about growing up as a conservative Christian, where she was taught that all sins could be forgiven, except one. That sin wasn't murder, mind control, or torture of another human, it was blasphemy against the holy spirit. When Jesus and his followers went out forgiving sins and casting out demons they *always* did so by "the power of the Holy Spirit," so Nadia realized the unforgivable sin isn't saying the Holy Spirit doesn't exist. The unforgivable sin is believing that there is no power to the holy, it's believing that you are not redeemable, or that someone else is not redeemable.⁴

As Christians we believe that people can change, we believe that human transformation is possible. We believe in redemption because we are so desperate for it ourselves. There's a great story in the Gospels about Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus made money in a dishonorable way. He was not considered a good man. He lived in a way which kept him from seeing what which was good and holy in himself. Then one day he climbed a tree so he could see Jesus. He put himself in the path of that which was most good and holy. When he did Jesus said, "Zacchaeus, climb down, I'm going to your house for dinner." Zacchaeus put himself in the path of God and God attached

¹ <https://brenebrown.com/transcript/brene-on-armored-versus-daring-leadership-part-1-of-2/>

² <https://brenebrown.com/transcript/brene-on-armored-versus-daring-leadership-part-1-of-2/>

³ <https://brenebrown.com/transcript/brene-on-armored-versus-daring-leadership-part-2-of-2/>

⁴ <https://nadiabolzweber.com/103-chris-schuhmacher/>

to him, pulling him out. Zacchaeus did the spiritual math and decided to give back everything he could and to be of service, and Jesus said, “redemption has come to you.”⁵ That is the work of God, to restore broken people. Thanks be to God, Amen.

⁵ <https://nadiabolzweber.com/103-chris-schuhmacher/>