

## *Out of Hiding*

7<sup>th</sup> Weekend after Pentecost – July 2/3, 2005

### Sermon Background Study

2 Samuel 9:1-13 (New Living Translation)

One day David began wondering if anyone in Saul's family was still alive, for he had promised Jonathan that he would show kindness to them. <sup>2</sup>He summoned a man named Ziba, who had been one of Saul's servants. "Are you Ziba?" the king asked.

"Yes sir, I am," Ziba replied.

<sup>3</sup>The king then asked him, "Is anyone still alive from Saul's family? If so, I want to show God's kindness to them in any way I can."

Ziba replied, "Yes, one of Jonathan's sons is still alive, but he is crippled."

<sup>4</sup>"Where is he?" the king asked.

"In Lo-debar," Ziba told him, "at the home of Makir son of Ammiel." <sup>5</sup>So David sent for him and brought him from Makir's home. <sup>6</sup>His name was Mephibosheth; he was Jonathan's son and Saul's grandson. When he came to David, he bowed low in great fear and said, "I am your servant."

<sup>7</sup>But David said, "Don't be afraid! I've asked you to come so that I can be kind to you because of my vow to your father, Jonathan. I will give you all the land that once belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you may live here with me at the palace!"

<sup>8</sup>Mephibosheth fell to the ground before the king. "Should the king show such kindness to a dead dog like me?" he exclaimed.

<sup>9</sup>Then the king summoned Saul's servant Ziba and said, "I have given your master's grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. <sup>10</sup> You and your sons and servants are to farm the land for him to produce food for his family. But Mephibosheth will live here at the palace with me."

Ziba, who had fifteen sons and twenty servants, replied, <sup>11</sup>"Yes, my lord; I will do all that you have commanded." And from that time on, Mephibosheth ate regularly with David, as though he were one of his own sons. <sup>12</sup>Mephibosheth had a young son named Mica. And from then on, all the members of Ziba's household were Mephibosheth's servants. <sup>13</sup>And Mephibosheth, who was crippled in both feet, moved to Jerusalem to live at the palace.

*Today's is a story of covenant, exile, and grace. These themes should resound as strongly in our own hearts as they did in the hearts of the ancient Israelites. These are our stories too.*

Last week, our subject was Moses, who was raised in the Pharaoh's household. Today, we meet Mephibosheth, who was born into the royal family, a grandson of Saul, the first king of Israel. Like Moses, the privileged life of Mephibosheth would be turned upside down, but at a much younger age.

#### *A crushing exile*

To be born the grandson of a king. Little Mephibosheth (don't you wonder if he had a nickname) was surely the darling of the entire royal household and all the people of Israel. You can bet that he was adored and doted upon. Yet, the boy's life soon took a tragic turn. At the age of five, his grandfather, Saul, and father, Jonathan, were killed in battle against Israel's arch enemies, the

#### David and Jonathan

About a thousand years before Jesus, God's prophet Samuel anointed Saul as the first king of the united tribes of Israel, who quickly proved to be a disappointment. He was disobedient to God and given to making rash decisions. Once, Saul was even ready to kill his own son, Jonathan, for breaking one of Saul's battle orders. Only the intervention of the people saved Jonathan's life. After Saul disobeyed God a second time, we are told that "The LORD was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel" (1 Samuel 15:35). God told his prophet Samuel to anoint a young shepherd named David as the next king of Israel. Not knowing that God had chosen David to be his successor, Saul welcomed David into the royal court as a musician. But after David defeated the Philistine giant, Goliath, the mentally and spiritually deteriorating Saul began to suspect that David might be the one to whom God had given Saul's kingdom. And Saul turned against David.

Jonathan, Saul's son, first met David soon after David's victory over Goliath and the Philistines. Like so many others during David's long life, Jonathan must have been drawn to the charismatic young man. We are told that Jonathan's soul was bound to David's. Jonathan loved David as he loved himself. Jonathan made a covenant with David, even handing over his royal robe and sword. It is important for us to see that Jonathan offered all this to David without even a hint of reciprocity or reward. Jonathan's covenantal friendship was a gift freely given. Indeed, this pretty much characterized their relationship. Twice more, Jonathan would make a covenant with David and only on the third occasion are we explicitly told that the covenant was made mutually. It is this mutual covenant that is the focus of today's story about Mephibosheth.

Philistines. Fearing that the Philistines would march upon the palace, the royal household fled in panic. One of the nurses grabbed Mephibosheth but accidentally dropped the boy, permanently crippling him in both legs (2 Samuel 4:4). Though they made it away safely, things went from bad to worse, at least from the perspective of Saul's family. David, whom Saul had tried to hunt down and kill, was made king over the tribe of Judah and eight years later was made king over all the tribes of Israel. He would have the power of life and death. Saul's family was right to expect that they were as good as dead. . . . Yet, *grace amazes and surprises*.

#### *At the king's table*

As noted in the page one textbox, Jonathan's friendship with David was often pretty one-sided. Twice, Jonathan had pledged himself to David without reciprocation. The pledges were Jonathan's freely-given gifts. But on the third occasion, both men made a covenant, the pledges were mutual.

After David, as the new king of the united Israel, defeated Israel's enemies and conquered Jerusalem, he sought a way to keep his covenant with Jonathan and to show respect to Saul. David asked Ziba, a long-time servant in Saul's household whether any of Saul's family still lived, so that David could extend mercy and kindness toward them. David might be a busy king, but there is always time for mercy.

Ziba reveals to David that Jonathan's son has survived and is living in the home of Makir. By now, Mephibosheth is about twenty.<sup>1</sup> Mephibosheth is old enough to know that to the king, at least to most kings, he is as good as a "dead dog." So, when he is summoned before the king, Mephibosheth perhaps expects that David plans on getting rid of all potential opposition, as was customary with many rulers then and now. David, however, ensures the continuation of Saul's household by inviting Mephibosheth to eat at David's table, giving all of Saul's estate to him, and asking the young man to live in the palace. In so doing, David takes Mephibosheth in like a son.

#### *After the revolt*

In an ironic turn, it is not Saul's household that poses a threat to David's monarchy, but his own. David's son, Absalom, turns on his father after David refuses to take action when another of David's sons (Absalom's half-brother, Amnon) rapes Absalom's full sister, Tamar. Two years later, Absalom would kill Amnon himself and eventually lead an attempted coup d'état against his father. Indeed, David has to flee eastward from Jerusalem where he gathers together forces loyal to himself. As David flees the city, he runs into Ziba, Mephibosheth's servant (2 Samuel 16:1-4). When David asks about Mephibosheth, Ziba tells him that his master has stayed in Jerusalem, expecting that with David's departure he will get back Saul's kingdom. Not surprisingly given this word of betrayal, David gives to Ziba all that belongs to Mephibosheth.

David's army puts down the rebellion, though it is a hollow victory. Absalom is killed in battle after getting tangled in the branches of an oak tree. Later, David would weep for him, saying "Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Samuel 18:33).

Upon returning to Jerusalem to reclaim his throne, David encounters Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 19:24-30), who is unkempt and generally filthy. When David asks him why he did not flee Jerusalem with those who were loyal to David, Mephibosheth says he tried but couldn't because Ziba took off with the donkey, leaving the crippled man with no way to leave. Mephibosheth throws himself on David's mercy, reminding him that he had invited Mephibosheth to eat at David's table.

Evidently, Absalom's rebellion and death have taken a huge toll on David. He doesn't even try to sort out who is telling him the truth about Mephibosheth's role in the rebellion, Ziba or Mephibosheth. Instead, David simply divides the estate in two, giving half to each of them.

The story of Mephibosheth at David's table is a story about *covenant*. God made a covenant with his people and would be faithful to it, even if the people would not. David made a covenant with Jonathan and would be faithful to it even after Jonathan's death. It is also a story of *return from exile*, one of the Israelites' favorite stories. It is the story of the Jews exile in Babylon and their own hoped-for return from exile. It is the story told by Jesus about a father and a prodigal son. It is a story of *grace*.

---

<sup>1</sup>Putting together a chronology is a little difficult, but at least ten years had passed and probably more. Time did not diminish David's desire to be faithful to his covenant.

## Daily Bible Readings

(more on *David's family and Mephibosheth*)

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Day 1 2 Samuel 11-12 David's adultery with Bathsheba</p>	<p>Day 2 2 Samuel 13-14 The rape of Tamar; the murder of Amnon; Absalom's return to Jerusalem</p>
<p>Day 3 2 Samuel 15:1 - 16:14 Absalom's revolt is born and David flees Jerusalem</p>	<p>Day 4 2 Samuel 18:1 - 19:8b The defeat and death of Absalom; David's grief</p>
<p>Day 5 2 Samuel 19:8b-34 David's return to Jerusalem and his encounter with Mephibosheth</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>

## Sermon Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### **Questions for God**

A new Sunday morning four-week teaching series with Scott Engle

9:30 in Wesley Hall – begins in two weeks: July 17<sup>th</sup>

In April, Rev. Hasley asked the congregation to write on an index card the one question they would most like to ask God. We had nearly 150 responses. We've reviewed and organized the questions. Beginning July 17<sup>th</sup>, Rev. Halsey will preach a four-week sermon series in which he will begin tackling some of the questions. Also, Scott Engle will teach a four week series at 9:30 in Wesley Hall on the questions for God.

### **St. Andrew Summer Lecture Series – continues on Monday, July 11**

Each summer, we offer a casual summer series. This year, we are meeting on the *second Mondays*. There is no sign-up required. Just come down to Piro Hall around 6:45 or so. We'll have refreshments and spend a little time getting to know one another. Scott Engle's lecture will start at 7pm. We'll wrap up no later than 8:30. Childcare is available. Our next two topics will be:

July 11: "Amazing Grace"

August 8: "Being Right, Wrong, and Righteous"

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

What do we make of these stories? In some ways it is like any primetime soap opera. David's adulterous affair with Bathsheba. Ordering the death of her husband. One of David's sons raping one of David's daughters. Another of David's sons murdering his half-brother in revenge for the rape and then leading an attempted coup against his father. It is hard keeping track of it all, much less looking for meaning. But at the same time, there are in these stories great biblical themes of covenant, return from exile, and grace. Despite all his difficulties and suffering, much of it the result of his own choices, David remains a "man after God's own heart" and the one with whom God makes an everlasting covenant.

You might look back over today's scripture and my concise retelling of the larger story. Here are some questions to ask yourself: What do these stories reveal to me about God? About humankind? What do they reveal about God's work in this world? About our own relationship with God and one another? This is not so much a process of looking for the "moral to the story" as it is learning to see these stories through the lens of a Christian worldview. For example, when you read about Mephibosheth's eating at the king's table, did it bring to mind Jesus' own desire to share a table with all the wrong sorts of people? How about Mephibosheth the refugee and Jesus' parable of the prodigal son? It isn't that we look for Jesus under every rock in the OT, but it is understanding that the God who made a covenant with David is the same God who made a covenant with you and me and who is fully revealed in Jesus Christ.