Hi,

Happy Monday. Here are today’s updates:

* My 3pm Monday Matthew class and my noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet this week on [my new Facebook Page: “Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC.”](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour)
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.

What is friendship? David’s friend, Jonathan, helps us grasp the meaning of true friendship.

***1 Samuel 18:1-12 (NRSV)***

**When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father’s house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him; as a result, Saul set him over the army. And all the people, even the servants of Saul, approved.**

**As they were coming home, when David returned from killing the Philistine, the women came out of all the towns of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. And the women sang to one another as they made merry,**

**“Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands.”**

**Saul was very angry, for this saying displeased him. He said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands; what more can he have but the kingdom?” So Saul eyed David from that day on.**

**The next day an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand; and Saul threw the spear, for he thought, “I will pin David to the wall.” But David eluded him twice.**

**Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul.**

***1 Samuel 19:1-7 (NRSV)***

**Saul spoke with his son Jonathan and with all his servants about killing David. But Saul’s son Jonathan took great delight in David. Jonathan told David, “My father Saul is trying to kill you; therefore be on guard tomorrow morning; stay in a secret place and hide yourself. I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak to my father about you; if I learn anything I will tell you.” Jonathan spoke well of David to his father Saul, saying to him, “The king should not sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have been of good service to you; for he took his life in his hand when he attacked the Philistine, and the Lord brought about a great victory for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced; why then will you sin against an innocent person by killing David without cause?” Saul heeded the voice of Jonathan; Saul swore, “As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death.” So Jonathan called David and related all these things to him. Jonathan then brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before.**

I hope you’ve read the book, *Same Kind of Different as Me*. It is the true story of a deep and abiding friendship formed between two men in Ft. Worth. Ron is white, a rich art dealer; Denver is black, a homeless man who has lived on the streets for most of his life. You could hardly imagine a more unlikely pair. They meet when Ron’s wife gets him to help her serve meals at a homeless shelter. She senses that God wants her to befriend the most intimidating man in the place, Denver, and she sends her husband over to sit down with him. They strike up an acquaintance and eventually Ron tells Denver that he wants to be his friend. Denver asks him: “I heard that when white folks go fishing they do something called ‘catch and release.’ . . . So, Mr. Ron, it occurred to me: “If you is fishin for a friend you just gon’ catch and release, then I ain’t got no desire to be your friend. . . . But if you is lookin for a *real* friend, then I’ll be one. Forever.”

Catch-and-release*.* That sure seems to describe far too much of what I hear about friendship these days. BFF? Best Friends Forever? 800 Facebook friends? What a joke. It’s a phrase tossed around like it is little more than “Have a good day.” BFF-for-a-day is more like it.

Denver and Jonathan help us to grasp what we really ought to mean by BFF. If you have such a friend in your life you are richly blessed. Denver is Ron’s “real friend” and Jonathan was David’s. And Jonathan’s friendship would be tested as few are.

*Like father, like son?*

During the time that the Israelites settled in Canaan, they had no earthly king. The Lord God was their king. But as time wore on, the people, wanting to be like their neighbors, pushed harder and harder for a human king. In the end, God gave them what they wanted. God’s prophet Samuel anointed Saul as the first king of the united tribes of Israel. Saul quickly proved to be a disappointment. He was disobedient to God and given to making rash decisions.

Once, Saul was even ready to kill Jonathan – his own son! -- for breaking one of Saul’s battle orders. Only the intervention of the people saved Jonathan’s life (1 Samuel 14:24-46). The story of Jonathan’s disobedience seems to prepare us for the possibility that the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. But we will learn that Jonathan is not the man his father became.

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’s heart turned against David, just as Jonathan’s soul was bound to David’s.

*The grace of friendship*

Like so many others during David’s long life, Jonathan must have been drawn to the charismatic young man. Jonathan’s soul was *bound* to David’s, according to the biblical writers. What a wonderful expression of a deep and true friendship.

But such a friendship is not really about how one feels but what one does. So, Jonathan made a covenant with David, even handing over his royal robe and sword. It is important 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. In Jonathan’s gift of friendship there is no *quid pro quo*; there is no transaction. *Such is grace*.

Reflecting a friendship based upon the bonding of souls, Jonathan always had to walk a tightrope between his loyalty to his father Saul and his loyalty to David.

In today’s second passage from 1 Samuel, Saul has set out to kill David. No tossing a spear at David in a moment of madness this time; the king is going to rid himself of a rival. So, Jonathan, who “delights” in David, must choose, and he goes to work for David and against his father’s desires. Jonathan persuades his father to spare David’s life and restore him to the royal court.

For awhile, Jonathan has to do no more than talk his father out of something. But as time goes on, Jonathan has to actively thwart Saul’s plans. For example, after an attempt on David’s life, Jonathan and David would conspire to save David from yet another of Saul’s plots (see chapter 20).

Even then, all that Jonathan asks of David is that, no matter what happens, David would always be faithful to Jonathan’s own family. At their last meeting (ch. 23), Jonathan eagerly abdicates to David his own right to be Saul’s successor. Not long after, Jonathan is killed in battle. It would be many years before David would act upon his promise to be faithful to Jonathan’s descendants.

Though soul mates, the relationship of Jonathan and David is pretty one-sided; Jonathan gives far more than he ever gets. Patricia Tull writes:

“Friendship often begins with the unmotivated kindness of one person toward another, a generous, uncalculated action offered simply from the joy of companionship. Jonathan’s spontaneous love initiated the friendship and over the course of several episodes he continues to nourish it. He asks nothing of David in the present; all he asks for the future is to be remembered for the sake of his descendants. . . Jonathan stands in good company with the God whose love for humankind precedes and exceeds all possible returns . . . [Jonathan] is the friend few of us deserve but most of us would dearly love to have.”

Jonathan could have acted like his father, working always to protect his own interests. Instead, Jonathan chose the path of friendship, covenant, and trust. He pledged himself to work sacrificially for David’s goodwill. *Such is love.*

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott