

Sermon, then Service - August 21, 2022 2 Samuel 13-18 (select)

It was a worst day ever. Worse than Dan Powter's Bad Day. Worse than any Boomtown Rat Monday. Even worse than Alexander's Terrible, Horrible, Worst Day Ever.

It was a worst day ever for David. His son Absalom was dead, killed in battle. Not as a national hero following and fighting for his father, but as a traitor who betrayed his father and led his country to war against God's King David. Killed in battle, not as a hero, but shame upon shame, hung up in a tree by his hair. For David, it was a worst day ever.

I said "a worst day ever" for David, not "the worst day ever" for David. David had more worst days ever. The day David took Bathsheba, then those seven days waiting for their son to die. The day he found out his daughter Tamar was raped by his son Amnon. The day David found out his son Amnon was killed by another of his sons, Absalom; Absalom sticking up for his sister Tamar. Then there's that worst day off in the future when David's son Adonijah tried to steal the throne from David's son Solomon.

I don't know, but our lesson today may have been the worst of those worst days ever. You hear the pain in David's voice - "**O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!**"

You're wondering, aren't you? How did Absalom get stuck up in that tree? We could talk about his hair, but it wasn't just hair that got Absalom stuck up in that tree. We go back in time, about nine years back. Absalom's half-brother Amnon rapes Absalom's sister, and David rages but does nothing. So Absalom avenges his sister and

kills his half-brother Amnon; David mourns, but does nothing. Absalom goes on the run. For 3 years, he's in exile out of the country, for another 2 years, he's in exile in Jerusalem with David his father refusing to see him. It's no wonder (is it?), how or why Absalom did what he did. Absalom was raised to discount his father, raised to take things into his own hands.

And so he did. For four years, Absalom worked to steal the hearts of Israel from his father for himself. For years, Absalom told Israel how he would take better care of them than his father, David, had. Then, after four years of campaigning, Absalom made his play; he sent out word: "Absalom is king!" The people liked what Absalom had been feeding them. We like people who tell us what we want to hear, don't we? David didn't like what he heard; he had to go on the run and flee Jerusalem. By the time Absalom and his army go after him, though, it's too late. David and his army are ready. And Absalom, it seems that Absalom doesn't have a clue as to what to do in battle. He's left hanging, dangling, his head caught up in the branches of an oak tree. What do you do with a traitor hanging by his head in an oak tree? Joab knew. And David? "**O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!**"

The whole thing is just so sad, so broken and messed up and sad. So how did Absalom get his head caught up in that tree? It begins with David taking it easy; instead of taking seriously the roles God had for him, David plays king and takes Bathsheba. Then when his family needed him to step up as a father, a man-of-God kind of father, David stands down, takes the easy way out, and hides. And how does it end? When his people need him to be standing up as king, David is curled up and whimpering.

That doesn't fit our usual picture of David, does it? We see David chosen by God, David strong to stand up to Goliath, David strong to stand down before Saul. We see David eager for God, eager to have God front and center in his life, front and center in his kingdom, bringing the ark of God home to Jerusalem. We see David eager to build a temple for God, wowing at God's promise that he, David, would be ancestor of God's forever king. One best-day-ever followed by another best-day-ever. That would be the perfect place to say: "and they all lived happily ever after."

Instead, we find David full of himself taking Bathsheba, killing Uriah. When David gets over himself, he confesses, he's forgiven, and it seems like life can get back to normal, back to life the way that it's supposed to be, godly, blessed, with another chance at "happily ever after." Instead, David stands down as father, and his family goes Jerry Springer on steroids. It's all so sad, so terribly dark and sad.

Sound familiar? We all know some broken families, some broken hearts, don't we? Sometimes we might think: "It's no wonder." Other times we might wonder: "I'm sorry; they're sorry. I'm trying to do right; they're trying to do right. God says he forgives. So why doesn't God fix this? Why doesn't God make things work? Why doesn't God makes things right?"

What are we to make of David's mess? What are we to make of our messes? It's not just the world out there and their sin that twists and destroys. It's not just their sin that tears families apart. It's not just their sin that turns our best-days-ever into our worst-days-ever, is it?

Thank God the end of our lesson wasn't the end of David. First, Joab gave David a kick in the pants: "You keep on like this and

nobody will want to follow you as king.” And then the Holy Spirit refreshed David’s heart. Sometimes on our worst days we need a gentle reminder to get off our pity-pot. But even better is when the Spirit of God opens our eyes to see what God has going for us. It took some time for David to see, but he learned to see his worst day ever as yet another day God delivered him from something far worse.

Absalom was ready to steal the kingdom from his father, ready to see his father dead, ready to crush all the promises that God had made to David. But God wouldn’t let that happen; God didn’t let that happen. God stepped in to deliver David from this worst day ever. God stepped in to keep his promise of that forever King who would make life right for his people.

I won’t say that after this worst day ever, David lived happily ever after. David was in for some more worst days ever. But God didn’t define David by his worst, and God didn’t relegate David to a life of the worst. Instead, when David was at his worst, and when David was facing his worst, God answered with his best. When David was his worst self, God answered with grace and forgiveness that had David singing: “**Blessed is the one whose sins are forgiven!**” When David was facing his worst, the worst of this world, God answered with grace and power that had David singing the psalm we sang today: “**From the LORD comes deliverance.**”

How could David be so confident? Part of it would be past experience. God had delivered him in the past; no matter how worst his day, God had always delivered him. But David had more than just past experience. David had God’s future promise, the promise of that forever King who would be born into his family to rule right and make life right for God’s people.

Read through David's psalms and you will see that David got to know what we know - God's forever King had some worst days of his own. Worst days that he got himself into, not by his own worst, the worst of his own making, but by taking our worst. After living his best, Jesus took our worst to the cross, crushed and cursed by God. But what did David know and what do we know? God wouldn't leave and he didn't leave Jesus crushed and cursed; he raised Jesus back to life as our forever King. Now with Jesus, you have your worst forgiven and gone, and in baptism you have his best to wear before God.

With Jesus, even after our worst, we get to join David in singing: "**Blessed is the one whose sins are forgiven.**" Even after our worst, we get to hope for better: "**Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.**" And just like David, when we're facing the world at its worst, with Jesus we get to look to God and know he will deliver. With Jesus, we get to sing like David: "**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**" With Jesus, we get to sing like David: "**The LORD is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid?**" With Jesus, we get to sing like David: "**Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**" Even in our worst days, we get to sing like David knowing this - our forever King has a forever best day ever coming for you. Amen.

THE SERVICE

IN OUR WORLD TODAY... we see families with so much hurt and broken-ness. Sometimes we might be tempted to think that godly people wouldn't cause or foster that kind of hurt and broken-ness. Sometimes we might be tempted to think that forgiveness should heal and fix that hurt and broken-ness.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we see that the hurt and broken-ness caused by sin is present also in families with God, where forgiveness is treasured, and hearts are eager to walk with God. So what is our hope? Life the way that it is supposed to be is coming - in heaven!

OPENING HYMN

"How Firm a Foundation"

Hymn 800

How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!

What more can he say than to you he has said,
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

"Fear not, I am with you, O be not dismayed,
for I am your God and will still give you aid;
I'll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,
upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

"When through the deep waters I call you to go,
the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow,
for I will be with you, your troubles to bless,
and sanctify to you your deepest distress.

"When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie,
my grace all-sufficient shall be your supply;
the flames will not hurt you; I only design
your dross to consume and your gold to refine.

"The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose
I will not, I will not, desert to its foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake!"

INVOCATION

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

CONFSSION AND ABSOLUTION

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves
and the truth is not in us.

**If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just
and will forgive us our sins
and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

Let us confess our sins to the Lord.

Holy God, gracious Father,
I am sinful by nature
and have sinned against you in my thoughts, words, and actions.
I have not loved you with my whole heart;
I have not loved others as I should.
I deserve your punishment both now and forever.
But Jesus, my Savior, paid for my sins
with his innocent suffering and death.
Trusting in him, I pray: God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Silence for meditation and reflection

Our gracious Father in heaven has been merciful to us. He sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, who gave his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

LORD, HAVE MERCY

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God,
and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let
us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.

Amen.

GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST

CW 176

Refrain: Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we
give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. *Refrain*

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take
away the sin of the world; have mercy on us. You are seated at the right
hand of the Father; receive our prayer. *Refrain*

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the
Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father.
Amen. Amen. *Refrain*

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord, keep your household, the Church, in continual godliness and set us free from all adversities that, under your protection, we may serve you with true devotion and holy deeds; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING

2 Samuel 15:1–17, 23–26, 30 (select verses)

In the course of time, Absalom provided himself with a chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead of him. He would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate. Whenever anyone came with a complaint to be placed before the king for a decision, Absalom would call out to him, “What town are you from?” He would answer, “Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel.” Then Absalom would say to him, “Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you.” And Absalom would add, “If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that they receive justice.” ...

Absalom behaved in this way toward all the Israelites who came to the king asking for justice, and so he stole the hearts of the people of Israel.

At the end of four years, Absalom said to the king, “Let me go to Hebron and fulfill a vow I made to the LORD. While your servant was living at Geshur in Aram, I made this vow: ‘If the LORD takes me back to Jerusalem, I will worship the LORD in Hebron.’ ”

The king said to him, “Go in peace.” So he went to Hebron.

Then Absalom sent secret messengers throughout the tribes of Israel to say, “As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpets, then say, ‘Absalom is king in Hebron.’ ” Two hundred men from Jerusalem had accompanied Absalom. They had been invited as guests and went quite innocently, knowing nothing about the matter. While Absalom was offering sacrifices, he also sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counselor, to come from Giloh, his hometown. And so the conspiracy gained strength, and Absalom’s following kept on increasing.

A messenger came and told David, “The hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom.”

Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, “Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin on us and put the city to the sword.”

The king’s officials answered him, “Your servants are ready to do whatever our lord the king chooses.”

The king set out, with his entire household following him; but he left ten concubines to take care of the palace.

The whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on toward the wilderness.

Zadok was there, too, and all the Levites who were with him were carrying the ark of the covenant of God. They set down the ark of God, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until all the people had finished leaving the city.

Then the king said to Zadok, “Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the LORD’s eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. But if he says, ‘I am not pleased with you,’ then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him.”

But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 3A

Refrain



From the LORD comes de - liv - er-ance; there-fore we will not fear.

Tone

LORD, how many / are my foes!

How many rise up a- / gainst me!

Many are say- / ing of me,

“God will not de- / liver him.”

But you, LORD, are a shield a- / round me,

my glory, the One who lifts my / head high.

I call out / to the LORD,

and he answers me from his holy / mountain. *Refrain*

I lie / down and sleep;

I wake again, because the LORD sus- / tains me.

I will not fear though tens of / thousands

assail me on / ev'ry side.

A- / rise, LORD!

Deliver me, / my God!

From the LORD comes de- / liverance.

May your blessing be on your / people.

Glory be to the Father and / to the Son

and to the Holy / Spirit,

as it was in the be- / ginning,

is now, and will be forever. / Amen. *Refrain*

SECOND READING *2 Samuel 18:1–9, 14–16, 21a, 31–33; 19:5–8 (select verses)*

David mustered the men who were with him and appointed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. David sent out his troops, a third under the command of Joab, a third under Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, and a third under Ittai the Gittite.

The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, "Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake." And all the troops heard the king giving orders concerning Absalom to each of the commanders.

David's army marched out of the city to fight Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. There Israel's troops were routed by David's men, and the casualties that day were great—twenty thousand men. The battle spread out over the whole countryside, and the forest swallowed up more men that day than the sword.

Now Absalom happened to meet David's men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom's hair got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going.

(Joab) took three javelins in his hand and plunged them into Absalom's heart while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree. And ten of Joab's armor-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him.

Then Joab sounded the trumpet, and the troops stopped pursuing Israel, for Joab halted them.

Then Joab said to a Cushite, "Go, tell the king what you have seen." The Cushite bowed down before Joab and ran off.

Then the Cushite arrived and said, "My lord the king, hear the good news! The LORD has vindicated you today by delivering you from the hand of all who rose up against you."

The king asked the Cushite, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

The Cushite replied, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man."

The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!" ...

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL

Luke 13:34–35

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise be to you, O Christ!

HYMN OF THE DAY

"Precious Lord, Take My Hand"

Hymn 835

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.

Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light.
Take my hand, precious Lord; lead me home.

When my way grows drear, precious Lord, linger near,
When my life is almost gone,
Hear my cry, hear my call, hold my hand lest I fall.
Take my hand, precious Lord; lead me home.

When the darkness appears and the night draws near
And the day is almost gone,
At the river I stand, guide my feet, hold my hand.
Take my hand, precious Lord; lead me home.

SERMON

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)

(Individually packaged wafers are gluten-free.)

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give him thanks and praise.

It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who promised that wherever two or three come together in his name, there he is with them to shepherd his flock until he comes again in glory. Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power, God of might.

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest, hosanna in the highest!

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Lord God, you are worthy to receive thanks and praise from all people. You created the world and all who live in it, and in your mercy you saved us. We give thanks to you for the grace of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Though in very nature God, he took the nature of a servant and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. He offered himself as a sacrifice for sin and redeemed us from its curse and penalty. He rescued us from the terrors of death and restored eternal life with you. He conquered our enemies and gained for us the kingdom of grace and glory.

Bless us as we receive your Son's body and blood, and lead us to remember his suffering, death, and resurrection. Forgive our sins and fill us with the hope of new life in heaven. Hear our praise and receive our thanks as we worship you—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my T body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my T blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

Amen.

JESUS, LAMB OF GOD

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.
Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.
Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; grant us your
peace.

DISTRIBUTION HYMN

"I Walk in Danger All the Way"
Hymn 836

I walk in danger all the way; the thought shall never leave me
that Satan, who has marked his prey, is plotting to deceive me.
This foe with hidden snares may seize me unawares
if e'er I fail to watch and pray; I walk in danger all the way.

I pass through trials all the way, with sin and ills contending;
in patience I must bear each day the cross of God's own sending.
Oft in adversity I know not where to flee,
when storms of woe my soul dismay; I pass through trials all the way.

Grim death pursues me all the way, nowhere I rest securely;
he comes by night, he comes by day, he takes his prey most surely.
A failing breath, and I in death's strong grasp may lie
to face eternity today; grim death pursues me all the way.

I walk with angels all the way, they shield me and befriend me;
all Satan's pow'r is held at bay when heav'nly hosts attend me.
They are my sure defense; all fear and sorrow, hence!
Unharmed by foes, do what they may, I walk with angels all the way.

I walk with Jesus all the way, his guidance never fails me;
within his wounds I find a stay when Satan's pow'r assails me;
and by his footsteps led, my path I safely tread.
No evil leads my soul astray; I walk with Jesus all the way.

My walk is heav'nward all the way; await, my soul, the morrow,
when you at last with joy can say farewell to sin and sorrow.
All worldly pomp, begone! To heav'n I now press on.
For all the world I would not stay; my walk is heav'nward all the way.

CLOSING PRAYER

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his mercy endures forever.

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for the foretaste of the heavenly banquet you have given us in this Sacrament. Through this gift you have fed our faith, nourished our hope, and strengthened our love.

By your Spirit, help us to live as your holy people until that day when you will receive us as your guests at the wedding supper of the Lamb, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

"Jesus, Still Lead On"
Hymn 842

Jesus, still lead on till our rest is won;
and although the way be cheerless, we will follow, calm and fearless.
Guide us by your hand to our fatherland.

If the way be drear, if the foe be near,
let not faithless fears o'ertake us; let not faith and hope forsake us,
for through many'—a woe to our home we go.

When we seek relief from a long-felt grief,
when temptations come alluring, make us patient and enduring.
Show us that bright shore where we weep no more.

Jesus, still lead on till our rest is won.
Heav'nly leader, still direct us, still support, console, protect us
till we safely stand in our fatherland.

OFFERING

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