

2 Samuel 51-5, 9-10; Mark 6:1-13

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

With apologies to Charles Dickens: “Saul was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Old Saul was as dead as a door-nail.” Saul died back at the end of 1 Samuel, back in chapter 31. The Philistines were once again attacking, and Saul left his army rode out into battle. David was busy recovering from a confrontation with the Amalekites, who had just attacked and ravaged the town of Ziklag (how would you like to live in a place called Ziklag?) Saul is fighting the Philistines, and he does a George Custer, he gets himself surrounded and out-gunned. And worse than that he gets at least three of his own sons killed. Rather than let those heathen Philistines rejoice over the killing of the king of their enemy however, Saul first attempts to get his own armor-bearer to kill him, and when that poor, terrified fellow refuses to do it Saul it says in chapter 31:4 took his own sword and fell upon it. He committed suicide.

2 Samuel begins then with the report of Saul’s death. That report comes to David. Now the guy bringing the news to David is an Amalekite (remember those are the people who just ravaged the town of Kiklag, that David turned around and kicked their butts). So this yutz thinks that he’s going to get all kinds of accolades because he is going to take credit for Saul’s death. He knows that Saul has been after David, trying to kill him now for years, and he figures that great things are going to come to the man who takes out of the enemy of the new king.

Have you ever heard the phrase: “Don’t Shoot the Messenger?” Because that’s what happens here – David, rather than rejoicing over the death of King Saul is truly, honestly, and deeply saddened. Because, regardless of all of his faults, despite the fact that on more than one occasion Saul actively sought to kill David, Saul was still the appointed king. Chosen by the Lord God Almighty, anointed by the prophet Samuel. Along comes some enemy of the state, claiming that he’s the one responsible for that king’s death, regardless of whether that king asked to be killed. So David gives this response, back in Chapter 1. <sup>14</sup> David says, “Were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the LORD’s anointed?” <sup>15</sup> then David called one of the young men and said, “Come here and strike him down.” So he struck him down and he died. <sup>16</sup> David said to him, “Your blood be on your head; for by your own mouth you have testified, saying, ‘I have killed the LORD’s anointed.’” So I think that we can learn at least a couple of very important lessons here. First of all, don’t tick off David. And the second point is little bit more to what we’re celebrating today, which is that this is one of the few times in history where the phrase “God and Country” mean close to the same thing.

Now, while indeed the reign of David is filled with ups and downs, of all the kings of Judah and Israel, David is the most faith-filled. Regardless of that little nighttime excursion he had over on the rooftop with somebody else’s wife, David was a faithful and a righteous king. He did his best to serve God, knowing that in serving God he in turn served his country. Now today, on this July 4<sup>th</sup>, here in the United States of America, we celebrate our Independence from the former

mother country, Great Britain. While indeed many of the men and women who fought that battle over two hundred years ago were strong believers, devoted Christians. They understood that serving country was not necessarily the same as serving the Lord God Almighty. As a matter of fact, many of those folks including the primary author of the Declaration of Independence, would not consider themselves Christian, but would rather consider themselves Deists. They believed in the Lord God, the Creator, the One who got everything going, but they felt that God really wasn't active in the world today as they knew it. And that Jesus guy – he was definitely NOT God. He was a good teacher, he was a great moral guy; but divine? Not so much. Thomas Jefferson even went so far as to rewrite the gospels. He first attempted to put them in chronological order, and then he cut out all the references to Jesus' divinity and all the miracles. So, I gotta tell you, in my opinion people who say that the United States is a Christian country goes against the personal beliefs of the men and women who risked their lives in that war to break away from Great Britain.

Now, you might ask, now okay, Brock why are you talking about this. Because I think our lesson today, David for the THIRD time, is anointed as king. Yes, I said the third time. He was first anointed by Samuel back in 1 Samuel 15, that's when he was still a young boy. Samuel gets a call from God to go out, God says to Samuel, 'Saul's blown it. I want you to go find the new king, the new person I am appointing.' And then so Samuel goes out and he goes to the tent of Jesse from Bethlehem. After looking at Jesse's seven big, strong, strapping sons and God keeps saying 'no, none of these boys,' Samuel anoints young teenage David, son #8. Shortly after the death then of King Saul, in chapter 2 of 2 Samuel, David is anointed king by all of the people of the southern kingdom of Judah (I know it gets a little confusing, but there is a southern kingdom of Judah and a northern kingdom of Israel, we sometimes call them by one name, but they are two separate areas). But the former military leaders of Saul puts one of Saul's' surviving sons on the throne in the northern area known as Israel. And it's only after a messy battle, a defection by an opposition general, and the assassination of that pretender king, then does David finally assume the throne for the whole country, both Judah and Israel. The kingdoms are united. They were united by a king and they were united by their God.

But we here in the United States, what are we united by? What is it that holds us together? What is it that binds us one to another? It's not our ethnicity, that's not what holds us together; nor is it a faith system, or religious practices. I think what unites us together as Americans is our love of our country. Despite whatever imperfections, or infighting or political parties might be happening. What holds us together is the realization that we, as a nation, we as the American people have the means to effect the whole world for positive change, or possibly for the detriment of the planet. But I think one of the things that, I hope, that unites us is our willingness to recognize that just because someone is different from us - different skin color, different speech pattern, a different way of worshipping - does not make them wrong. We don't have to follow the same god, or be a member of the same political organization, or listen to the same type of music. We can be just as devout American by listening to Toby Keith as we can by being a fan of the Dixie Chicks. You can be an ardent proclaimer of NASCAR or the Indy 500; you extol the wonderfulness of the Kentucky Derby or the Tour de France. You can gladly follow the NBA, the NFL, the PGA, the NHL, or the MLB or whatever other alphabet string you want to slap together there. But it is all of those things that bring us together as Americans.

But it doesn't work for us as believers in Christ. What brings us together as Christians, what binds us together as the Body of Christ, are the promises of our baptism. Those promises that we will follow God, that we are forgiven, that we have been washed clean. What holds us in union to one another is the bread and the wine. The Body and Blood of the one who died for me, and for each and every one of us here.

We need to remember, I think, on this American Holy Day (and I don't mean that in a sacrilegious or facetious manner, because I think that this is a holy day for us Americans. I mean it with the utmost respect because I do love my country and I am glad that I am a citizen), that the phrase "God and Country" are not one and the same. "God Bless America" is a request, not a command. It's a plea, not an order; a supplication, not a demand. God blessed David because of his faith. By blessing David, God in turn blessed the country that David served. God is with each and every one of us here regardless of how faith-FULL or how faith-LESS we might be, God, because of the promise of our baptism, God is with us. It's when we Listen to God. It's when we Serve God, it's when we Follow God, THAT's when we serve our country. And so with apologies once again to Charles Dickens: "May God bless us, every one."

Amen.