



“Dynasty – Family Squabble”

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday & Sunday, August 11 - 12, 2018

The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33; John 6:35, 41-51

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

We have about six chapters to get through, from where our lesson ended last week and where it picks up today. I'll do my best to make it as PG-13 as possible, but it's really more of an NC-17 story.

Last week, we heard the conclusion of the David & Bathsheba storyline. In the very next chapter, things go off the rails. We get the story of David's oldest son, Amnon, who has, let's call it a “major crush” on his half-sister Tamar. Amnon manipulates Tamar into coming to his quarters, whereupon he forces himself on her. When he's done, he tosses her away like a used tissue. Tamar goes immediately to her full-brother, Absalom, and tells him what happened. Absalom takes *two years* to plot his homicidal revenge against his older half-brother Amnon and is finally able to carry it out.

Because he's killed his father's favorite son, Absalom goes into hiding for three years, but is eventually reconciled to his father due to the machinations of General Joab. Joab is about the *only* person, other than the prophet Nathan, who can get away with telling King David what to do.

Absalom returns to Jerusalem, and it takes two years before David officially, and openly, forgives Absalom. Absalom then spends the four years or so ingratiating himself into the hearts of the average citizens. He stands out by one the main entrances to Jerusalem, greets people, and talks with them, asking them why they were coming to town that day. If they answer that they were coming to get a dispute settled, Absalom would say

“See, your claims are good and right; but there is no one deputed by the king to hear you. . . If only I were judge in the land! Then all who had a suit or cause might come to me, and I would give them justice.” (2 Sam. 15:3-4 NRS)

This guy is a real piece of work.

Eventually, Absalom convinces King Dad that he wants to go north to Hebron to make a sacrifice in fulfillment of a vow he made while on the run from David, although this “fulfillment of a vow” is really more like “a cart full of horse hockey.” David, thinking none the worse of Absalom, acquiesces, and lets Absalom head north with a “small” entourage of 200 court officials.

Unbeknownst to David, Absalom sends word all around the north that when he arrives at Hebron, they are to proclaim him as the new king. Which he does. And they do. Back in Jerusalem, David is told Absalom has the backing of the ten northern tribes to be king. So, David and his remaining loyalist hightail it out of Jerusalem and go into hiding. David, however, **is** able to leave a few moles behind, which is how he learns more about Absalom's plans.

Absalom returns to Jerusalem, takes the palace, and officially declares himself king by, among other things, having sex in public with David's concubines (he's like a dog marking his territory). Shortly thereafter, Absalom goes out in battle against his father the king.

One thing we have to understand about Absalom is that, unlike those of us who are follically-challenged, he has long, luxuriant, strong hair. Unfortunately for him, he is waging battle while astride his trusty steed, and they are in a rather dense forest. His hair gets tangled in some low-lying tree branches. Absalom gets stuck, but the mule keeps going.

This is where our reading picks up for today: there he is, hanging by his hair, when General Joab's soldiers find him, and **against** David's **direct orders** (*Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom* - v5), Joab strikes Absalom with a spear, and his soldiers finish Absalom off. David is informed of Absalom's death (that's what the Cushite in our reading did) and goes into a time of mourning. Which is where our first reading stops.

Now, before we feel *too* sorry for him, we have to remember that God *did* warn David. We heard that warning *last* week, when the prophet Nathan confronted David over his sexual conquest of Bathsheba, and subsequent arranged murder of her husband Uriah. Nathan prophesied:

¹⁰ Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. ¹¹ Thus says the LORD: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. ¹² For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." 2 Samuel 12:10-12

Today, we get to see *yet another* of the low points in David's life: we are reminded that he is not necessarily always a good guy. In fact, we see that David is a fundamentally flawed human being.

So, in other words, David is a lot like **me**.

I have messed up more relationships than I can count: with people I've dated, with friends, with family members, classmates, co-workers, congregation members, my *spouse*. I have to work diligently at not losing my temper, or saying sarcastic, hurtful, things, especially when I'm ticked off.

But what if, in this reading of grief and sorrow, we replace the name "David" with the name "God," and then we replace the name "Absalom" with "John," or "George," or "Jim" or "Kathy"

or “Carolyn” or “Sharon” or whatever **your** name happens to be? How do you start to feel about this story now?

Hopefully no one here has ever raped their half-sibling or murdered **anyone**. I am *really* hoping that no one here is attempting to overthrow a government. But I *would* bet that most, if not all of us here, *have* thought and spoken badly about someone else, and; thought about, and maybe even tried, to get revenge on some one for a real - or perceived - wrong, or; thought the world might be a better place if a specific person - or if *several* specific persons - was no longer among the living.

Thinking that way, David’s responses are kind of suddenly relevant to *my* daily life. I’m not plotting revenge on a murderer, but I this morning, driving north on 15, doing 65 in a 55, I was passed on both side by four cars, who then all four got in the middle lane in front of me. And I **did** momentarily think about speeding up and pulling in front of *them and* putting on my brakes. Quickly. Maybe you’re remembering the way your boss chewed you out in front of the whole rest of the staff, and what you *Really* wish you would have said in response. Perhaps you’re thinking about how that time your spouse, or best friend, weren’t all that nice to you, and so you did that thing - you know which thing - that thing that really just *get to* them, on purpose.

Absalom, son of the king, was not nice, to a lot of people, on a pretty grand scale: Rape; Insurrection; Public indecency; Inciting Civil war. Did he get what was coming to him? Did he get what he deserved? Did he deserve such an ignoble death? I don’t know.

David, Absalom’s father, anointed king, *ancestor of Jesus*, is highly regarded. But he **also** was not always nice to people: he abused his position of power; he ordered the murder of an innocent man; through his *inaction*, he condoned the atrocious, reprehensible actions of his own sons. Did David get what he deserved? Did David get what was coming to him?

Do **ANY** of us get what we deserve? I mean, what we really deserve? Okay, maybe you didn’t get that promotion at work you were totally qualified for and had the most experience for. Maybe you didn’t get that grade on your paper, even though you put in all those extra hours, while your classmates just kind of slacked off, and you all got the same grade.

But what about all those *other* times you didn’t get what you deserved? Like that time when you didn’t see the stop sign and just blew through the intersection? What about when you said that thing that *you* thought was funny and silly and would make people think you’re witty, but what you *actually* said was something crass and thoughtless?

Do **any** of us get what we deserve? God *sees* our sin. God *knows* our sin. God is hurt *to the core* by our sin. And God most definitely does **NOT** give us what we deserve.

God calls us to change. God *wants* us to change. God *loves us* enough for us to change. God calls each of us to turn **from** our sin, to turn **from** the wrong we so willingly do, **from** the ways we so willingly hurt one another. God calls us to turn rather **to** the new life that comes to us in the water and the Word, in the bread and wine, in the body and blood.

God **gives** each of us Love and Grace and Forgiveness. **None** of which we can earn. **None** of which we deserve.

Thanks be to God that God does that!

Amen.