

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost August 2, 5 & 6, 2006

St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

IN DIFFICULT TIMES YOU LEARN WHO YOUR REAL FRIENDS ARE

1 Samuel 20:30-35, 41-42

Do you have friends? Most people would probably say, “Yes, I have friends.” What exactly is a friend? Each of us here would probably define a friend in a different way. Some people consider those they know as friends. Others would say that a friend is someone in whom I trust and am able to share my feelings, thoughts, fears and joys. A friend is someone that you can depend on. A friend is someone that will be there for you when you need them.

Once talking to a man in his late 80's whose wife had to be in a nursing home I asked if he visited her every day. He responded yes and then gave a very telling reason why. He said he would see many people in the nursing home who never seemed to have any visitors and who were calling for family and friends and no one was there for them. He said he didn't want his wife of almost 60 years to think that she had been forgotten. That's a friend. It's a person who stays by you no matter what situation you may find yourself in. Now does everyone and can everyone do that? No. As we continue our study of the early life of David before he became the King of Israel we see an example of friendship, love and commitment between David and the son of King Saul of Israel, Jonathan. As we consider a very difficult and heart wrenching event in their friendship, I would like us to consider this thought, **IN DIFFICULT TIMES YOU LEARN WHO YOUR REAL FRIENDS ARE.** Friendships have their ups and downs. Because each of us is sinful and imperfect and we each have different expectations and hopes from a friendship, we can be disappointed, hurt and devastated by things that happen and by attitudes, words and actions of a friend. Let's examine **I) David and Jonathan's Friendship** and then look at **II) Our Best Friend** who is a descendant of King David.

DAVID AND JONATHAN'S FRIENDSHIP

David was a shepherd boy. He was the youngest of eight sons of Jesse from the town of Bethlehem. When God disinherited King Saul and told Samuel that Saul's descendants would not continue on as kings of Israel, he had Samuel go to Bethlehem and anoint David to be King Saul's successor. David had become the harp player for Saul when Saul would be afflicted with an evil spirit. His harp playing would soothe and calm Saul during those difficult times. We heard last week how David had killed Goliath. This had endeared David to the people of Israel. They sang “Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands.” (1 Samuel 18:7) This had upset Saul and he became jealous of David.

However, Saul's son, Jonathan, admired David and they became the best of friends. As you read about their lives you note that they both had a strong faith in the promises and protection of the Lord. When David heard the taunts of the Philistine Goliath and went out to meet his challenge, he trusted that the LORD his God would protect him and deliver this enemy into his hands. Jonathan had a similar trust in the LORD as he at one time had faced the armies of the Philistines. So David and Jonathan became very close friends. Even when Jonathan learned that David would succeed Jonathan's father, Saul, as the next king of Israel that did not ruin their friendship. Even though according to custom it should have been Jonathan who should have succeeded his father as the king.

Saul on the other hand, hated David and attempted to kill him. David finally approached his good friend Jonathan and told him what Saul was attempting. Jonathan had once before approached his father and Saul had assured Jonathan that he did not wish David dead. David now tells Jonathan a different story. So David and Jonathan devise a plan where Jonathan may be able to learn if what David says is true. Our reading picks up as this plan is being carried out. There was a new moon festival and David was expected to be at the king's palace for the festival. He told Jonathan that he was not going to attend. He said to Jonathan that if Saul asked where he was he was to say that David had requested to go to Bethlehem to be with his family to offer a special sacrifice to God. Jonathan would then learn if his father's intent was to kill David. Jonathan also said the way he would let David know the results is that he would come out the next day to do some target practicing with his bow and arrows. He would bring a young slave boy to retrieve the arrows. If he shot an arrow short and told the boy to come back, it was safe for David to come out of hiding and come with him. If he shot the arrows far and called to the boy, the arrows are beyond you run further, then it was not safe and David would have to flee.

The first day of the new moon festival Saul noticed that David's place was empty but he assumed that David was ceremonially unclean and was not able to attend the festival. On the second day when David's place was still empty, he asked where David was. Jonathan told him that David had requested to go home to Bethlehem to be with his family for an annual sacrifice to God. That's when Saul blew up and said to his own son, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!" (Vv. 30-31) Saul indicated his true feelings and desires.

Jonathan, who was a faithful and true friend, defended David before his father. He said to his father, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" (v. 32a) Saul then threw a spear at his own son. Jonathan then knew that his father intended to kill his best friend David. The next day Jonathan went out with his bow and arrows and his young slave boy and carried out the plan that he and David had devised. When the boy went back to the city, David came out of hiding. Jonathan and David hugged and kissed and cried. Jonathan then said to his friend, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'" (v. 42) David then left.

Years later after Saul had committed suicide and Jonathan had been killed in battle, when David was king he asked if there were any descendants of Saul to whom he could show kindness. There was one son of Jonathan, a man named Mephibosheth, who was crippled that David took into his palace and provided for.

In David and Jonathan you see an example of true and lasting friendship. Even when times were tough and the king was opposed to David, Jonathan did not turn on his friend. Even though David would receive the crown of Israel rather than Jonathan, Jonathan did not betray his friend David. He loved David and was truly a friend to him both in the good times and in the difficult times.

OUR BEST FRIEND

Today we often see people disappointed, hurt and devastated because people they thought were friends aren't there for them when they need them. Sometimes people's concepts of friendship are not the same as those who they call friends. As Christians we recognize that we live in an imperfect world among imperfect and sinful people. We also recognize that our own basic nature is selfish and corrupt. Often times we have friends because of what they can do for us. At times we become friends with someone only later to stab them in the back because familiarity can breed contempt. You see people's weaknesses and sins and in anger and disillusionment you reveal those faults to others. Then you confide in someone that you consider a friend and they go and blab all over town what you told them in confidence. You feel betrayed and hurt.

There is one friend, however, who never once will hurt us, disappoint us or betray our confidence. That friend happens to be one of the descendants of King David. His name is Jesus Christ. He is our God and Savior. He is a friend who is always there for us. He always has an open ear and has time to listen to us. He also has the power to help us in every situation.

In difficult times when you and I really mess up and most of our friends would turn their back on us and walk away, he never does. He once said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) Jesus Christ gave his life not only for his friends, but for those who hated and killed him. He gave his life for every human being who will ever walk on the face of this earth. Why? Because he loves us all. He forgives and forgets all our sins and rebellion. He picks us up when we fall and puts us back on our feet. When we wander off and stray from him, he doesn't let us go but comes looking for us and is always there with waiting arms to welcome us back when we return beaten, battered and defeated. He is the best friend we will ever have.

The poet put it well when he wrote, “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!” (CW #411 V1a) When we have difficult times
we know there is one friend that will never desert us nor turn his back on us. Jesus Christ, our God and
Savior. What comfort what peace we truly have in him.

Amen.