

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

*August 8, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin*

## **Commentary on 2 Samuel 18:5-7, 9-10, 14, 31-33** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The promise of God through Nathan that "the sword shall never depart from your house" is fulfilled in this story of Absalom's death which began in 2 Samuel 13. David had a number of wives and concubines before Bathsheba. The story of Absalom involves two of these unnamed women. To one was born Amnon and to another was born Absalom and his sister Tamar. Amnon thought he was in love with Tamar and connived to get Tamar alone with him. After he raped her, he dismissed her which crushed the spirit of Tamar. Absalom killed Amnon and was banished by David. Even after David and Absalom were reconciled, Absalom felt wronged and usurped David's rule leading to a bloody civil war. The end of that war is the passage read today. It should be noted that it is Joab, whom David first sent to war while David stayed home, who kills Absalom. Everything comes full circle. David's grief can be viewed as a father who lost his son but also as one who knows that it was his sin that led to this destructive end. It is grief not only for the loss of a son but for all those who died in the senseless revolt. It is ironic that an event which began with David staying at home when kings went to war would end with David deep in blood.

2 Samuel 18:33 Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!

When have you ever done something you wish you could take back?

Did it help knowing it had to be done?

Are you still carrying that burden of regret?

Does it help to know that God in Jesus has forgiven you?

Can you forgive yourself?

Is there someone you need to ask for forgiveness?

## **Commentary on John 6:35-48** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

This passage speaks directly to the mystery of Christ in John. In the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), people are drawn to Jesus but fail to understand his parables. For John, failing to understand is failing to see. They can not see Jesus unless the Father reveals Jesus or more importantly reveals Christ to them. They may know Jesus, the human who grew up in the area of Galilee, but they fail to see the Incarnation of God, Emmanuel, the Christ child in Jesus. Just as the bread is more than bread, Jesus is more than just Jesus of Nazareth. This is the mystery of Christ in John which only the Father can disclose just as the Father can only be known through Christ. By this logic, only those whom the Father blesses can "see" Christ and only through Christ can the Father be known. It is not by human sight or human logic that the Gospel of John makes sense but through faith. It is by faith that the bread becomes the body and it is by faith that Jesus becomes Lord of our lives. This is why literal quotes from the Gospel of John can become obstacles to those who do not have faith but, to those who accept by faith, they become the words of life.

John 6:38 "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me."

What does it mean to follow Jesus?

Does it just mean memorizing his words?

Or does it mean to imitate his life?

What is more important, his actions toward the poor or his obedience to God?

Does following Jesus simply mean doing God's will?

How do you seek to follow Jesus/do God's will every day?

## **Commentary on Ephesians 4:22-5:2** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The Ephesians text this morning was extended back three verses from 25 to 22 in order to place the lesson within the proper context. If we begin at 25, it would appear that Paul is giving a laundry list of moral lessons in the vein of Proverbs. By beginning at 22, it is clear that the moral lessons are in the context of being a new person in Christ which ties to 5:1-2 that states we are to be imitators of God. Rather than letting our old emotions rooted in sin of bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander, and malice govern our behavior, we should manifest the gifts of the Holy Spirit: faith, hope, and love. By manifesting love rather than discord we "live in love, as Christ loved us" and we "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God". The phrase, "do not let the sun set on your anger", is often used to counsel young married couples. This is more than just good advice from Paul's view but is the fruit of a new life in Christ where forgiveness and mercy take primacy of place.

Ephesians 4:22 You were taught to put away your former way of life

What is this "former way of life"?

What if we have led a "good" life?

If our "former way" is not pleasing to God, what is?

Could this "former way" be more about our ego than about our actions?

Is the root of all our sin, the arrogance to think that we know best?

Could the "former way" simply mean the way we lived without following Jesus?

## **Sermon "What Seed will You Plant"** ([Sermon Video](#))

In the early 1800s, the philosopher Hegel said that every civilization contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. In Greek plays, the character always has a fatal flaw that leads to their collapse. As Christians, we understand our fatal flaw to be rooted in sin. Now sin will manifest in different ways in different people depending upon their temptations and their own history of brokenness. Those who were brought up with affection will constantly seek affection often from inappropriate sources for example. These outward manifestations come from our selfish desires and the selfish world we live in. This was true with Adam and Eve as well as with David. When we act upon these desires, like David and Bathsheba, we sow the seed of our own sorrow and there are usually unforeseen consequences (at least unforeseen by us).

Nathan told David that everything he did in secret would be done in public and the sword would never leave his household. David never could have predicted that his oldest son by one wife would rape his daughter by another wife. When he fails to punish his son, the brother of his daughter Absalom takes vengeance and eventually leads a revolt by the northern tribes of Israel against David. Despite Absalom's actions, David does not want to see any more of his children killed and orders Absalom's safety. David, however, had long since given Joab too much authority and that will lead to Absalom's death. The harvest of David's sin was indeed bitter. While David would have gladly faced his own death, he instead suffered the cruelest payment of a parent. David's cry to God is that of a father who would rather give his own life than to see the death of his children.

Like David, we all stray from God's will and have to face bitter fruit. As Paul states, "the wages of sin is death". Knowing our sinful nature and the consequences of those actions, God's heart breaks for us as David's did for Absalom. Unlike David, God could and did give his life for us. Jesus, Emmanuel (God with us), came to hang on the tree instead of us. Just as Absalom was pierced, Jesus was pierced for our rebellion, for our sin. He takes our place on the tree planted by the seeds of our sins and bares the consequences of our selfishness. This is the offer made by Jesus to all who trust in the Father's promise of grace and mercy. If we but have faith in the Father's mercy, we will be drawn by grace into the arms of Jesus. Those arms will never let us go and never let us fall. When we find our strength and our nourishment in the bread of life, the love of God on Earth, we find that the seeds of grace have replaced the seeds of destruction and we have been given eternal life.

If we have been given such a wonderful gift and have been spared the consequences of our own arrogance, then why do we keep planting new seeds of our own destruction? When we go back to our old habits and our old selfish way of thinking, we turn our back on the new life offer by Jesus and grieve the Holy Spirit. The gift of love which is patient and is not rude is replaced by anger, malice, and hateful speech. And then, like petulant children who never learn, we come crying to the Jesus to once again take our place on the tree of our sin. Just as Paul asked the Ephesians, we must ask ourselves why we continue to seek our will and our way rather than fully trusting in God's grace to lead us down the path of eternal life. Every time we act without praying, speak without discernment, we once again sow the seeds of our own destruction.