

A Father to Believe In

Last Sunday I told you the story of King David and his son, Absalom, who had killed his half brother Amnon for raping his full sister, Tamar. I told you how Absalom was in exile in Gesur and how David mourned for him as much or even more than he mourned for Amnon, whom Absalom had killed. We saw how David's friend Joab intervened and convinced David to allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem. We talked about the Scripture in II Samuel 14:14, where it says that God will always devise plans to bring back to himself those who have run away from him.

But I said something in the sermon last week that I want to pick up on today, especially since it's Father's Day. I said last Sunday that although David did the right thing to bring Absalom back home to Jerusalem, he didn't go far enough. He made a good beginning, but he failed to follow through in restoring Absalom to fellowship.

This is what we read about in our Scripture this morning. II Samuel 14:21-24 say, "Then the king said to Joab, 'Very well, I grant this; go, bring back the young man Absalom.' Joab prostrated himself with his face to the ground and did obeisance, and blessed the king; and Joab said, 'Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your sight, my lord the king, in that the king has granted the request of his servant.' So Joab set off, went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. The king said, 'Let him go to his own house; he is not to come into my presence.' So Absalom went to his own house, and did not come into the king's presence."

The new situation is this. Absalom has been brought back to Jerusalem from exile in Gesur, but his father David, will not allow him to come to the palace. David will not go to visit Absalom nor allow Absalom to come to him. And, since there were no telephones, e-mail, or text messaging back then, there was no communication between them.

II Samuel 14:28-29 tell us, "So Absalom lived two full years in Jerusalem, without coming into the king's presence. Then Absalom sent for Joab to send him to the king; but Joab would not come to him. He sent a second time, but Joab would not come."

Absalom must have had his hopes up when Joab brought him back to Jerusalem. He looked forward to a reunion with his father. He longed for his father's understanding and forgiveness. He probably assumed that it would be a bit awkward at first, but the invitation for him to come home surely meant that reconciliation was on the way.

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When he was not brought immediately into the king's presence, he may have assumed that urgent matters of state were demanding the king's attention or that the king was making special preparations for his coming home party, but when days turned to weeks and weeks to months and months to years, it became clear that Absalom was being given a cold shoulder. Finally, Absalom couldn't stand it any longer. He contacted Joab but Joab who was loyal to David, wouldn't answer his messages. He had to find some way to get his attention.

II Samuel 14:30-32 tell us what came next: "Then he (Absalom) said to his servants, 'Look, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire.' So Absalom's servants set the field on fire. Then Joab rose and went to Absalom at his house, and said to him, 'Why have your servants set my field on fire?' Absalom answered Joab, 'Look, I sent word to you: Come here, that I may send you to the king with the question, "Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still." Now let me go into the king's presence; if there is guilt in me, let him kill me!'"

I believe Absalom's desire for his father's acceptance and his offer to accept punishment were sincere. And, finally, after his extreme measure of having Joab's barley field burned, Joab intercedes for him a second time, and Absalom is granted a long-anticipated meeting with his father, David. II Samuel 14:33 says, "Then Joab went to the king and told him; and he summoned Absalom. So he came to the king and prostrated himself with his face to the ground before the king; and the king kissed Absalom."

We don't know exactly what transpired between Absalom and David beyond this one meeting, but apparently it wasn't good. Either that, or it was too little too late. Absalom's long exile and the cold shoulder he received for the first two years after returning to Jerusalem had taken their toll. Though David loved Absalom, he could not or would not give him the father-son relationship Absalom needed. Absalom, whom we know now to be a man of action, decided to get back at his father where he knew it would hurt the most.

II Samuel 15:1-6 say, "After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run ahead of him. Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the road into the gate; and when anyone brought a suit before the king for judgment, Absalom would call out and say, 'From what city are you?' When the person said, 'Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel,' Absalom would say, 'See, your claims are good and right; but there is no one deputed by the king to hear you.' Absalom said moreover, 'If only I were judge in the land! Then all who had a suit

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or cause might come to me, and I would give them justice.' Whenever people came near to do obeisance to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of them, and kiss them. Thus Absalom did to every Israelite who came to the king for judgment; so Absalom stole the hearts of the people of Israel."

The Scripture tells us that Absalom was a very handsome man and leads us to see Absalom as a very charismatic leader. He was good looking, flamboyant, charming, and sly. He was a consummate politician; he knew how to make friends and influence people. Right under David's nose, Absalom won the hearts of his father's subjects. The people began to see David as the past and Absalom as the future. They came to want or at least to think they wanted change. Absalom sold himself to them as their messiah and they bought into his message--hook, line, and sinker.

At the end of our Scripture lesson this morning we see the beginning of Absalom's attempted coup, and David's decision to flee his palace. II Samuel 15:7-14 say, "At the end of four years Absalom said to the king, 'Please let me go to Hebron and pay the vow that I have made to the LORD. For your servant made a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram: If the LORD will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will worship the LORD in Hebron.' The king said to him, 'Go in peace.' So he got up, and went to Hebron. But Absalom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, 'As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then shout: Absalom has become king at Hebron!' Two hundred men from Jerusalem went with Absalom; they were invited guests, and they went in their innocence, knowing nothing of the matter. While Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh. The conspiracy grew in strength, and the people with Absalom kept increasing. A messenger came to David, saying, 'The hearts of the Israelites have gone after Absalom.' Then David said to all his officials who were with him at Jerusalem, 'Get up! Let us flee, or there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Hurry, or he will soon overtake us, and bring disaster down upon us, and attack the city with the edge of the sword.'"

We will never know the whole story about David and Absalom, but obviously the father/son relationship left a lot to be desired. I think a big part of the problem can be traced to the fact that David had eight wives and many more children than he had time to be a father to. Absalom had to compete with many brothers and sisters and also with David's profession as King of Israel. And although David was particularly fond of Absalom, probably because he could see a lot of

himself in Absalom, he didn't take the time to give Absalom what he needed. David tried to raise his children from a distance; he did not know where they were or what they were doing. This allowed the destroyer to do his ugly work among them.

Another significant event, which led to the chaos in David's family, was his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah, the Hittite. The example he set for his son Amnon on how to take what you want, regardless of the cost to others, was followed by Amnon in his treatment of Tamar. The example he set for Absalom in how to give orders to destroy your enemies, was followed by Absalom in arranging for the murder of his brother Amnon. It's interesting how David's trouble with his children fulfilled the prophecy of Nathan, who, following David's affair with Bathsheba, told him in II Samuel 12:10-11a, "Now therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own. This is what the Lord says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you.'"

The first two reasons David failed as a father were these: #1, He chose to have more wives and more children than he could possibly care for adequately. And, #2, He put himself and his household under a divine curse by violating the law of the Lord. A third thing that David did wrong was that he offered Absalom only partial forgiveness and limited reconciliation. When he brought Absalom back to Jerusalem and then refused to see him for two years, David did inestimable damage to their relationship. The apostle Paul, writing in Ephesians 6:4 says, "And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

David's offer of partial forgiveness and limited reconciliation provoked Absalom to wrath. Like many children today who are neglected or abused, Absalom simmered with anger, and when he was crossed, that anger boiled over. It led Absalom to murder his brother and prompted him to attempt taking away his father's kingdom. In the end it destroyed him.

For all the fathers and potential fathers here this morning the lessons we get from our Scripture lessons this morning are fairly clear. If you bring children into the world, you have a responsibility to meet not only their physical needs but also to meet their emotional and relational needs for a father who cares. You need to take an active interest in your children's lives and be there for them to give guidance, appropriate discipline, and to listen to their concerns. Children are not like TV sets that you can control with a remote. They take hands on training and a

lot of careful fine-tuning. Fathers need to take the time to know who their children are and what's going on in their lives and what they are thinking and feeling. **It takes a lot of time and effort to be an effective father.**

Secondly, and perhaps the most important thing a man needs to do to be a good father, is to set a good and godly example. The way a father treats his parents and his wife and the way he conducts himself in business and the reputation he builds for himself in the community, will effect the way his children perceive him, and respond to him. The reverence he shows toward God and the consistency with which he lives up to what he says he believes, will effect the ability of his children to believe. **It takes a godly man to raise a godly child.**

Thirdly, a Christian father must model the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. The partial forgiveness and limited reconciliation common to man must be surrendered to the radical and unconditional forgiveness offered in the cross of Christ. On this Fathers' Day as I reflect back on my relationship with my own earthly father I am very thankful for his forgiveness. I disappointed my dad many times, and I was punished accordingly. But my dad never held a grudge. Once it was over, it was over and I always knew he loved me just as much after I was punished as I was before. His forgiveness was complete and undiluted. **Godly fathers forgive their children with the unconditional love of Christ.**

King David was, for the most part, a great man of God and one of Israel's most effective and most loved leaders, but he was a lousy dad. My challenge for all the fathers and future fathers here today is to seek God's strength and wisdom to do better than David. My challenge is for you to be fathers your children can believe in. May the Holy Spirit give us the will and the strength to be godly fathers.

My challenge to everyone else is to encourage and pray for the fathers in your lives. We need all the help we can get!

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Sermon for June 15, 2008

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II Samuel 14:21-15:14

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