

DAVID AND JONATHAN

Sermon Preached by the Rev. Dr. Lindley G. DeGarmo
Towson Presbyterian Church
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Psalm 19
1 Samuel 18:1-4

We have certainly had some high profile funerals in the past couple of weeks. It may be a sign of my age that I was more affected by the death of Ed McMahon several weeks ago than by Michael Jackson's passing. We had early bedtimes when I was growing up, so it was a big deal when I'd be away from home and occasionally get to watch the old Tonight Show at somebody else's house. There was an illicit thrill in hearing that 'Heeeeeere's Johnny!'

It occurs to me that you may have the impression that Jonathan, son of Saul, was the Ed McMahon of the Old Testament—that Jonathan's whole role in the Bible was to say, 'Heeeeeere's David.' I'd like to suggest to you this morning that Jonathan was a lot more than just an announcer or a sidekick. "Second in command of the armies of Israel and son of [the king], Jonathan was a decorated warrior in his own right. Just before the account of David and Goliath there is a wild tale starring Jonathan that rivals even David's famous [exploits]. The Philistines were in control of the strategic heights [south of Bethel]. The Israelites were so outgunned and outmanned that they began to desert in droves. Saul's army quickly shrinks from 3,000 soldiers to a mere 600 men. Someone has to step up. Someone has to do something. One day, the soldiers look up and see the crown prince of Israel, Jonathan, climbing hand over hand up the cliff towards the Philistines. Jonathan went on a [Delta Force] rampage against the Philistine garrison. [When the smoke cleared,] Jonathan was standing alone at the top of the hill with twenty Philistines at his feet.¹

"A few days later the giant Goliath shows up and not even Jonathan had courage to take him on. Imagine how Jonathan felt that day when he saw a boy in a shepherd's tunic run right at Goliath and take him out with a rock. I can imagine Jonathan thinking, 'Oh my! I'm good. I'm really good, but this kid is phenomenal. This young man is the future of our nation.' The King James Bible captures it best when it says, in that moment, 'Jonathan's soul was knit to the soul of David.'² Suddenly, the two men were interlocked. [They experienced, as the New Living Translation puts it, 'an immediate bond of love between them, and they became the best of friends.' Certainly it is one of the greatest friendship in the Bible and perhaps in all of literature.] Like binary stars, David and Jonathan revolved around one another. Listen to I Samuel, Chapter 18, verses 1-4.

¹When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.² Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house.³ Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. [Now

¹ I Samuel 13:23 – 14:15.

² I Samuel 18:1.

we glimpse a foreshadowing of what is to come.] ⁴ *Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.*

“Imagine the scene as the crown prince stands in only his undergarments. He’s placed his royal robe over the shoulders of a young shepherd boy. How thrilled Jonathan was to find a friend.

“We’re all Jonathans. We have within us a gaping hole that can only be filled by human companionship. It’s how we were made. Did you ever notice that even in paradise Adam was lonely? We have this marvelous picture of God trying to fill Adam’s emptiness by bringing the animals to Adam for him to name. Here comes a creature. Adam says, ‘I think I’ll call it a giraffe. I think I’ll call it a bird. I think I’ll call it a jaguar.’ What’s really happening in this animal parade is Adam looking for a companion. So Adam says, ‘The chipmunk won’t do. The orangutan won’t do. The elephant won’t do.’ And your heart goes out to poor Adam. He’s like a young man in [Fells Point] who’s desperate for a date and winds up spending all day alone at the Aquarium...

“[There is no creature from the animal kingdom] who can fill Adam’s loneliness. [Not even God can fill] Adam’s emptiness. [It’s] is abundantly clear from Genesis is that God is not all we need. Though [God] could have been, [God] chose not to be. Instead, God put a mysterious vacancy deep in our souls that sends us in search of friends[: other human beings]. We are designed as an Adam in search of Eve; a Jonathan in search of David. We yearn for intimacy in our lives.

“Jesus built his ministry around intimate friendships. Mark tells us Jesus ‘called to himself the twelve that they might be with him.’³ Our Lord wanted friends to be with him. At the end of a long day, after he had been savaged by his critics and thrown out of the synagogue, he could come home to find his friends around the campfire. Jesus would share with them his heart, his dreams, and even his struggles.

“Think about our Lord’s temptations in the wilderness. How did that get into the gospels? No one was with Jesus out there those forty days and forty nights. Jesus *told his friends* his experiences one night around the fire. He said, ‘Guys, you can’t believe what I’ve gone through. For weeks on end I went toe to toe with the devil himself.’ It was the deep, close relationship that the disciples had with Jesus that made all their future hardships endurable.

“Jonathan’s soul was knit to the heart of David. Intimacy is certainly an important part of friendship, but for a friendship to last it must also have loyalty...Friends are united in bonds of loyalty. Jonathan was what we’d call today ‘a stand up guy.’ What makes that so remarkable is at the same time Jonathan was living out his loyalty to David he was negotiating a minefield of conflicting loyalty to his father, King Saul.

“Last week [I talked about] how Saul self-destructed from his envy of David. He made six different attempts on David’s life. First, Saul tried to carve his initials on David’s body with his spear, and then later he went on a cold-blooded manhunt. Throughout this ordeal, Jonathan’s loyalty to David never wavered. Even when his father kept saying, ‘Jonathan, you’re crazy, *For as long as the son of Jesse lives upon the earth, neither you*

³ Mark 3:13-14 alt.

*nor your kingdom shall be established.*⁴ In other words, ‘Jonathan, if David lives you’ll never be king.’ True enough, but we see in [chapter 19, verse 4], ‘*Jonathan spoke well of David.*’⁵ You couldn’t drive a wedge between these two men. Pascal[, the French philosopher,] once said something that may make us squirm, ‘I set this down as a fact, that if all men knew what each other said of the other, there would not be four friends in the world.’ Two of those friends would be David and Jonathan...

“After a while the pressure of Saul’s manhunt takes its toll on David. The Psalms of this era of David’s life reflect discouragement and depression almost to the brink of suicide. Jonathan gets wind of David’s plight and at risk to his own life slips out of the palace and into the wilderness for a rendezvous with David. In the beautiful language of Scripture it says, ‘*Jonathan strengthened David’s hand in God.*’⁶ Think of all David owed Jonathan. Without Jonathan, David would have been dead. Jonathan’s protection included a shield around David’s spirit. How easy it would have been for David to have become bitter, twisted, and hate filled. Jonathan reached out to David and brought him thoughts of God, hope, and grace. He placed his arm around David’s shoulders and prayed with him.

“There is a phrase that appears several times in the conversations between David and Jonathan. We read: ‘the Lord between you and me,’ ‘the Lord watch between you and me,’ ‘the Lord judge between you and me.’ In a nutshell, that’s the key to friendship – the Lord between us! [That’s what we’re acknowledging when couples come here to be married, when they come and stand [here in the chancel] and say [in effect,] ‘the Lord between you and me for the rest of our lives.’ It’s so hard to love with our own wills. We need the Lord between you and me.’⁷

“If it takes God to help us be loyal, oh, how much more we need God for the next thing Jonathan does for his friend. Jonathan sacrificed himself for his friend. Jonathan surrendered his rightful succession to the throne of Israel for the sake of his nation and his friend. He stepped aside and said, ‘David, it’s all yours.’ He sacrificed his career.

“It reminds me of twenty year old Anne Sullivan arriving in Tuscumia, Alabama to tutor seven year old Hellen Keller. Helen was blind and deaf and could only utter animal-like sounds. At times, Helen would fall into destructive rages. For months, Anne Sullivan tried unsuccessfully to break into Helen’s consciousness. Finally, on April 5, 1887, the barrier was broken. Helen was holding a mug under a spout as Anne pumped water into it. Into Helen’s other hand, Anne was spelling over and over w-a-t-e-r, w-a-t-e-r. Suddenly, Helen understood. Years later, Helen remarked, ‘Spark after spark of meaning flew from hand to hand and miraculously, affection was born.’⁸

“Anne Sullivan gave her life to Helen Keller, in a Jonathan sort of way. By age ten, Helen was writing in French to famous people in Europe. She mastered five languages and went far beyond her teacher in fame and intellect. But Anne Sullivan never lost her loyal devotion to Helen Keller. She sat beside her at Radcliffe, spelling each lecture in her

⁴ I Samuel 20:31.

⁵ I Samuel 19:4.

⁶ I Samuel 23:16.

⁷ I Samuel 20:42, 24:12.

⁸ Alan Loy McGinnis, *The Friendship Factor* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2004), 59-60.

hand. Just as Jonathan made David into a king, Anne made Helen Keller the [center] of her world...

“The plan was for David to be king and for Jonathan to be prime minister. But it was not to be. One day word comes that Jonathan along with King Saul had been killed in the battle of Mount Gilboa. David’s dream was to grow old with Jonathan. Everything up until now had been on the run. He felt so gypped. David, who did everything bigger than life, writes one of the great laments of all time. His spirit screams like a wounded animal.

²³ Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions....²⁵ How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your high places.²⁶ I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.⁹

“David never again had a friend like Jonathan. It was as if David’s whole life from here on was a search for another Jonathan. Instead he wound up with those who would betray him: his generals and even his own children.

“If you have a Jonathan, treat him well and thank God for that friend. Call [him] today and tell [him] you love them. Treasure that relationship.

“Erma Bombeck[, the humorist and wry observer of suburban life,] tells of her husband’s best friend, Ed Phillips. Ed was the best man in their wedding and was the one who introduced the two of them to each other. She writes that during the wedding when Ed handed the ring to her soon-to-be husband Bill she thought, ‘Well that’s the end of that friendship. No more playing cards ‘til dawn, no more boys’ nights out.’ Now it would be just the newlyweds watching sunsets and gazing into each other’s eyes. Then at the reception Erma said she couldn’t find her husband. Finally, she spotted him out in the parking lot with Ed planning their next get together as soon as he got back from the honeymoon. She said, ‘This is going to be harder than I thought.’¹⁰

“The Bombecks returned from their honeymoon and their lives went on. One Sunday afternoon they were having a barbeque with Ed and his wife. Ed announced casually he was going to have open heart surgery the next week. He said, ‘We’ll get together as soon I’m up and around again.’ That next week, Ed Phillips, age 33, died after surgery.

“Erma Bombeck writes, ‘The house was quiet. As I passed the doorway to our bedroom I could see the silhouette of my husband sitting on the bed, shoulders slumped and head bowed. He looked so alone. I wanted to carry some of the hurt, but I didn’t know how.

“Here was the man with whom I had now shared three children, a home and a life for 12 years. And yet we didn’t know each other well enough to cry together.

⁹ II Samuel 1:23-26.

¹⁰ Erma Bombeck, *A Marriage Made in Heaven...or Too Tired for an Affair* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 3-6.

“Our marriage had never taken either of us to this level before. It had always been like a business with each of us carrying out our individual roles. He was the provider, and I was the nurturer who could handle anything.

“I was about to reach out and touch his shoulder, but instead I started to walk away. Then his voice broke the silence. ‘We used to play in the dirt together in the alley behind the garage,’ Bill said quietly.

“I made a place for myself beside him on the edge of the bed. ‘He arranged our first date with each other,’ I added.

“Slowly, awkwardly, with tears streaming down our faces, we reached out. Neither of us knew how much strength we had to give, but we were willing to share it. We gave each other something that most friendships are not able to give – vulnerability. Throughout our years together, we had built up a history and closeness so subtle even we didn’t know it was there. On that evening, we admitted we could not handle life alone. We needed each other.”¹¹

“My dear friends, whom I love so much here at TPC, we have a friend who died to bring us together. A friend so loyal he gave his life on a cross for us. You have a Jonathan who knits himself to your soul, who clothes you in the robe of his righteousness and places you on the throne of his love. You have a friend who strengthens your hand in trials and difficulties. Because of Christ you need never be alone again because he has brought you here to this group of friends this morning.”¹²

Thanks be to God! Amen.

¹¹ Bombeck, *A Marriage Made in Heaven*, 73-74.

¹² Victor D. Pentz, “David and Jonathan: The Power of Positive Linking,” Sermon preached at Peachtree Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, Georgia, September 14, 2004.