

David the King
2 Samuel 7:1-17
October 31, 2021 – Center Harbor Congregational Church, UCC
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P R A Y

This is how my week usually goes: On Monday, I create the bulletin for the coming week, and start to think about my sermon. I read the scripture and commentaries and I pray. On Tuesday, I write my sermon. On Wednesday, Terry mails the sermon and bulletin to folks who can't come to church, and I create a Sunday School lesson based on the sermon, and I go shopping for the materials that the kids will need for that lesson.

Then Thursday comes, and Bible Study. We read the passage for the week. Perhaps I give a little background. Then I ask, "What are you thinking about this passage?"

Usually there's a polite silence, then someone will offer a thought, and someone else will respond, and we are off and running. We get into some really deep theological waters. I am often delighted when one of the members, with no theological training, offers a thought or a question that might have been uttered by Martin Luther or John Wesley. We cover a lot of ground!

Then another person will ask a question that makes me say, "Wow! I hadn't thought about this passage like that!" Eventually, one person will quietly say exactly what I had written for my sermon that week, and I will know I have gotten my sermon right.

But that didn't happen this week. We struggled with this passage. It was like chewing on a piece of steak that looks delicious and turns out to be tough as leather. No one felt uplifted at the end of the hour, including me.

I want to say to the Bible Study members, thank you for the integrity of our wrestling with this passage. Not every Bible passage has an easy or obvious interpretation. Not every passage hits home in the way we expect. But they all have something for us to learn.

After Bible Study, I kept chewing on this passage for the next couple of days, and yesterday, I tore up my original sermon and started over. So, for this morning, I want to make this as simple as possible. I want to just talk about:

- Why I chose this scripture,
- What I think about this passage, and
- How I feel about it.

I chose this passage because it is a crucial turning point in the story and the theology of the Hebrew Scriptures. After King Saul's death at the hands of the Philistines, David has been made king. David, who was anointed by Samuel when he was just a boy. David who killed the giant Goliath when he wasn't much older than that.

David, now grown, has united the Northern and Southern tribes. He has conquered the Jebusite city of Jerusalem, which sits between the North and the South, and made it the capital of the united nation. He has consolidated all the symbols of military and political and religious power in his capital – the Bible mentions specifically that he brought the priests from Shiloh into his court, and he found the Ark of the Covenant that had been stored somewhere out west and brought it to Jerusalem, to be the focus of worship there.

This is all a huge change for Israel – moving from a loose tribal confederacy to a united nation. Israel experienced peace and prosperity during David's reign that they had not experienced before. They stood equal with the nations around them. A thousand years later, about the time Jesus was born, the people of Israel were still longing to return to those days, they were still asking for "A King Like David."

So, I chose this passage because it represents a turning point in the history of the nation, and one that shaped the culture and psychology of the people into which our Savior was born.

I also chose this passage because it is also a turning point in the theology of the Old Testament. Before, God's relationship was with all the people of Israel, with each one equal to the other. From this point on, the Bible talks about God's relationship with the kings of Israel. This royal theology, centered on David and his descendants, dominates much of the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures. So, both politically and theologically, it is important for us to be aware of this story. Little David has grown up to be king. God will bless him and his house forever.

But it's the part in the middle that intrigues me. It makes me think. David says, "I have this great house, but God only has a tent," meaning, the Ark of the Covenant is in the Tent of Meeting, not in a temple. "I want to build a house for God."

And God says, "No. No, you can't contain me like that. I have never asked for a house. I have been free to move around since I brought you out of Egypt. I go where I will."

Later in this passage, God says, "Your son can build me a house, but not you." Scholars say that this confusing contradiction comes from the fact that two separate oral traditions, one from the North and one from the South, were merged together when this passage was finally written down. That happens a lot in the Bible, and we have to just accept that sometimes the Bible contradicts itself in this way.

But I come back to that first answer that God gave to David. "You can't tie me down by building me a house." It reminds me of a passage from the C. S. Lewis book *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Do you know that book? Perhaps you have read it to your children or grandchildren. Near the beginning, the Beavers are explaining to the children that the famous Christ-like figure Aslan isn't a man, but a lion. Little Lucy says, "Then he isn't safe?" "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King I tell you."

We think of God so often as friend, comforter, companion, and God is all those things. But today's scripture reminds us that there is a wild side to God, a Spirit that is determined to be out in the world, a power we cannot contain. God is quite capable of doing things that surprise us, or make us uncomfortable.

I wonder in what ways we, like David, assume that what we want is also what God wants. When our hearts are set on something, it's tempting just to skip past asking God if we have chosen the right path, more tempting still to not wait around for the answer. I love the IDEA of God being wild and free. I don't like it nearly so much when it pinches my own plans, as David's plans were pinched. This passage will be food for thought and prayer for me for a long time to come.

So, I have told you why I chose this passage and what I think about it. How I feel about is much easier. My heart is captured by the ending of this scripture, God's promise to love David and his descendants unconditionally. Up to this point, all of the covenants between God and the people were conditional. For example, God says to Abraham, IF you will leave your homeland and go to the land that I will show you, THEN I will bless you through your descendants, and I will multiply them like the stars in the sky. But here, we get the first glimpse of God's unconditional love and grace. God says to David, I want you and your descendants to do what I have told you to do, and if you don't there will be consequences for that, but nothing that you do can ever keep me from loving you.

We hear this same message again and again in the New Testament. It is the foundation of Reformed theology. Paul writes to the church in Rome, the

passage that we all know: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This is the great promise of our faith, a promise first uttered to King David, and one we claim today. I hold it in my heart. I carry it to bed with me each night and wake up with it each morning.

This God, whose Spirit is not tame at all, but wild and free, has chosen to love each of us, unconditionally, forever. And for that I say, thanks be to God! Thanks be to God!

Amen