

Sermon: Remember Who You Are

Lesson: 2 Samuel 11: 1-15

Lesson: Ephesians 3: 14-21

Lesson: John 6: 1-21

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A number of years ago, when my children were quite small, we watched, many times, a Disney film called *The Lion King*. It is now a popular theater production. As many of you probably know, the central character in this story is a lion cub named Simba who is led to believe that he is at fault for his father's death. Simba flees the tribe, leaving his evil uncle Scar to rule. After some time, when Simba has grown up in the carefree company of a meerkat and a warthog who live by the motto, "Hakuna Matata, a Swahili phrase meaning "No worries" – no responsibilities- , Simba is visited by the spirit of his father, Mufasa. Mufasa says to Simba – "Remember who you are – you are my son." and challenges Simba to return to the tribe, to take up the role to which he has been called – the Lion King.

As I read this week's lectionary passages, and pondered what God would have us hear through them, this is the phrase that kept coming into my mind – Remember who you are.

It is clear that David did not remember who he was, or who he was called to be. David had come a long and difficult path from the time that he had stood at the edge of the Israelites' camp and challenged the Philistine warrior Goliath, relying on the power of the God of Israel. There had been life in the palace with Saul, and then banishment. There had been wars, sparing of Saul's life, being named king of all Israel, and the defeat of many enemies. No longer a young man, yet not an old man, David has come into his own as king – and has begun to live as though all has happened by his own hand.

The writer of 2 Samuel gives us a few hints that David has forgotten who he is. Our passage begins with "In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David *sent Joab* with his officers and all Israel with him, ...But *David* remained at Jerusalem." While those he commands are far from home and comfort, David is at leisure, able to observe a woman bathing at a distance, learn that she is married to one of his soldiers (who is out fighting for him and for Israel), and yet assumes that what David wants, David the king is entitled to have. David's descent into worldly entitlement is made all the more clear by contrasting his behavior with that of Uriah the Hittite. Uriah, summoned home by David to cover up David's misconduct, refuses to take advantage of this unexpected respite from the war. "The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in an open field; shall I then go to my

house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing.” With these honorable words, Uriah unknowingly rebukes his king, and signs his own death warrant. David, perhaps ashamed but surely desperate, now tries to hide his sin by removing Uriah from the picture altogether. He issues the order which will ensure Uriah’s death, and then sits back and waits. Our reading this morning ends at this point. The story goes on. We’ll hear this next part of the story in next Sunday’s reading, but it is important for today’s sermon to say briefly what happened.

All appears to have gone according to plan – the messenger arrives and declares that Uriah is dead. After a period of mourning, David marries Bathsheba, and a few months later a baby is born. To some it may even have appeared that David was being generous in taking care of the widow. All has been covered up – or so David thinks, until the prophet Nathan comes to visit.

Nathan tells David a story, a report of a rich man who had a poor neighbor. The rich man took the one lamb of the neighbor and prepared it for a guest, rather than use one of his own lambs. David is outraged, saying that the rich man deserved to die because he had no pity. Nathan tells David that David himself is the rich man. God has seen what David has sought to hide. Nathan, as God’s messenger, lays before David all that God has done for David, and reminds him of the promises that God has made to David, and then condemns David for failing to remember who and whose he is. David has been raised to be king of the people chosen by God to be a light to all nations. However, David has forgotten who he is, and for what he and his people have been called. He has chosen to live a lesser life, a life of king by the world’s rules. God is not content to let him do so.

What a contrast this is to the passage we read in John! Jesus, whom the letter to the Philippians reminds us, “though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness,” feeds five thousand people with five loaves of barley and two fish. There is a power within him that has been shown to the public. Yet when the people are ready to take him by force and make him king, Jesus slips away, withdraws to a mountain by himself to avoid this misdirection of God’s plan. This King of kings, fully divine yet also fully human, servant of God will not be distracted by the worldly notion of power and entitlement. Jesus knows who and whose he is, and will not be tempted to disregard God’s eternal purpose, in order to win the short term gain. Jesus will not accept any advancement which depends upon the will of the people rather than the will of God. To be royalty for Christ, is to be the servant of the Lord, and to lead the people where they need to be in close relationship with God.

Christians, we who declare that we are followers of Christ, are called to

follow in this path of obedience. We are called to live in a way of obedience that brings God glory and leads others to God. We are called to do this not because God has this supersized ego that constantly needs to be stroked, nor because God is some big tyrant who is so insecure that God cannot stand disagreement. We are called to give faithful obedience to God which brings God glory because we have been shown in the revelation of Jesus Christ that God's glory is love – abundant, overwhelming, empowering and righteous love. God's glory is to fill us to overflowing with this redemptive love so that our lives may be truly full and the love God gives may be shared with all. We are baptized into Christ's obedience into his death - a death of sin, of entitlement, of self-centeredness - and into his resurrection – a new life of grace, of thankfulness, of relationship and of hope. Christ's death and resurrection reveal the love, grace, power, and glory of God. By grace we are permitted to move from a narrow self-focused life into this abundant life. What an amazing gift!

Why is it then, that so many of us – myself included – live more like David than like Christ? Oh, we may not include adultery in our sins – or murder. Yet we do take our privileges for granted, as something we have earned by our own hard work. We become resentful of calls upon our generosity, determining that we have given as much as we can, at least without sacrificing our comfortable way of life. We are often more concerned with the opinions of our fellow human beings than with God – even imagining that we can hide our sins, even from God. We settle into a demanding way of life, struggling to meet our own and the world's expectations, rowing in a boat in a storm with the winds blowing and the waves rough – sometimes failing to see Jesus walking out on the sea and coming near to declare, “It is I; do not be afraid.”

In a little while we will celebrate a baptism – Ella Schellhas. We have enjoyed a number of baptisms this year. In each of them has been a short line, which has likely gone mostly unnoticed. “Let us remember with joy our own baptism, as we celebrate this sacrament.” This statement is not suggesting that we reflect back to try to remember when we have been held in the arms of a pastor and had the waters of baptism placed on our heads, smiling a little at the cuteness of it all. We are called, in witnessing each baptism, to remember with joy *that* we too have been baptized – that we have been called and claimed by the God of glory and grace for new life. We are called to acknowledge again that God has reached out to us – even though we did and do not deserve to be called – to tell us not to be afraid, to show us that God has claimed us as God's own just because God is love and is full of grace, not because God owed us anything.

In baptism we are called to live into the life which Paul prayed that the Ephesians – and all believers – might have. This is a life lived in the Holy Spirit,

with Christ dwelling in our hearts so that each day, each moment, might be rooted and grounded in love. The life of baptism is the life which is so filled with the comprehension of the breadth and length and height and depth of the fullness of God, so filled with the riches of *God's* glory, that the pettiness of the world's claims upon us become seen for what they are.

We are none of us yet fully living in that life of baptism. Though baptism is done once and for all, and is God's action not our own, it takes the fullness of our lifetime for us to live into the grace that we receive in baptism. There will be times when each of us may need our Nathans, our own prophets, to call us back into the life we are called to remember and live. This, too, is God's grace. For we are not baptized solely into an individual life or relationship with God, but are baptized in the Body of Christ, the fellowship of believers, the family of God with whom and through whom God works to draw us all closer to the life God graciously offers us in Jesus Christ. As members of Christ's Body, we promise to reveal through our lives, not only to little Ella, but to each other and to the world, the grace of Christ, the love of God, which redeems all creation. We promise to teach one another, through our words and deeds, who Christ is – so that whether we are on calm waters or stormy, we may know Christ is near, can know the truth of Christ's promise to be with us, to help us confront our sins and fears, and to lead us home.

Remember who and whose you are. Remember, too, that the One who claims and calls us, is the One who works within us through the Holy Spirit, to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. To God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21, slightly paraphrased).

Though not directly quoted William Willimon through his book, Remember Who You Are, (Upper Room Books, 1980), provided inspiration for some of the thoughts in this sermon.