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David VI: Care – Psalm 106, portions of 1 and 2 Samuel

David's had a rough time of it here over the past couple of weeks – it's time to rehabilitate him, because no matter how complicated and sinful his was, he had a heart for God, and God loved him.

David sinned on a grand scale, but he also had compassion deep as a saint, and we're going to look at him from that perspective today. First, he had the gift of bringing peace and calm to troubled souls, a gift as great as any; second, he had an exceptional love and loyalty to his word and God's direction; and third, he had the humility and grace to listen to others, especially at the most difficult times, when he was confronted with his own failings, mistakes, and sins to his face.

David first appears as the eighth son of Jesse, one of the elders of Bethlehem, anointed by the prophet Samuel to be the successor to Israel's first king, Saul. This is problematic, since Saul is still King, but has lost God's favor. Saul is plagued by an evil spirit, sent from God. His advisors recommend soothing music, and in particular, the musical skills of David, Jesse's boy, to soothe the mad king's soul when the evil spirit torments him. David, though just a youth, is already well enough

known throughout Israel has skill, by God's grace, is so great that he is able to do just what he's famous for: soothing a troubled soul.

That ability is an example of David's caring personality – his gift of peace, even in a sinful warrior.

I've known, and I hope that you have too, people whose presence, whose touch, changes a room, a mood, a crowd for the better. Some of those people are right here now: you know what I mean, someone who makes you feel good just because they've entered the room there. What a gift! What a personal embodiment of God's love and grace! If it could be taught or bought, we'd all have it: but it's reserved for the very few, and David is one of them; as we're told in 1 Samuel 16:23, "Whenever the evil spirit...affected Saul, David would take the lyre and play it. Then Saul would relax and feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him alone."

The second way that God used David to care for others was in David's love and loyalty. Here, David – even though he was already chosen to be Saul's successor, was fiercely loyal to Saul. David not only became the closest of friends with Jonathan, Saul's son, even though in his madness Saul tries repeatedly to kill David, David keeps coming back to serve Saul and be a companion to Jonathan as long as he can. David and Jonathan cover a lot of ground together, far too much to deal

with here; but one great example of David's amazing loyalty to the man who'd kill him if he could, is in 1 Samuel 24.

David and his men, banished and pursued by Saul, are in the back of a cave, when Saul, a lot closer to his quarry than he realized, came into the very same cave for a break. David's men, hearing Saul approach, urge him to kill the king. The two men are so close that David is able to cut off a corner of Saul's robe without him even noticing. Instead, after Saul leaves, David calls out to him, waving the piece of Saul's robe in his hand: "Why do you listen when people say David want to ruin you? I won't lift a hand against... the Lord's anointed" – and Saul breaks down, saying, "You are more righteous than I am because you have treated me generously, but I have treated you terribly... when someone finds an enemy, do they send the enemy away in peace?" Yet, that's exactly what David does. They don't exactly kiss and make up, we're told that David goes to his fortress and Saul back to Jerusalem, but both are still alive and well.

The third way that David demonstrates care is in his ability to admit his own failings and sin – not always, he is human, but startlingly often. This is another face to David's grace, another way that God works through him, and can work through us.

These events take place once he's king, which makes them even more remarkable. Kings, especially kings in David's day, are not kind

to critics: most people just do what the King wants, and stay clear of confrontation. But David's story records so many situations where he is not just told that he may, perhaps, have been receiving some inaccurate advice, he listens to those who point out his own sins, damning ones. Nathan, the leading prophet during David's time, at least twice tells him he's flat wrong: once, as we saw last month, when David wanted to build a temple for the ark of the covenant, and second, when Nathan condemns David's adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband (and many others, as well). Even Joab, David's top general and no angel, for sure, is able to speak truth to David when he's wrong, as in the banishment of Absalom and in David's dangerous self-pity over Absalom's death. David will – not always, but often – listen to good advice, change his course, admit his sin. David's psalms themselves echo over and over the turmoil and tension between his great power, his overwhelmingly attractive personality, his love for and desire to obey God, and his care for others – even, or even especially, those who are at the margins of his kingdom: one quick example: the first verse of Psalm 41: “Those who pay close attention to the poor are truly blessed! The Lord rescues them in troubled times...” and just a little later, his humility comes out: “But me? I said, ‘Lord, have mercy on me! Heal me because I have sinned against you.’”

This David is the same David we've been running down the last two weeks: though he sinned greatly, he loved God magnificently, and he fought within himself and his calling to do God's work.

Which brings all this right home to us. How many of you have never made a mistake, raise your hands. Anyone who's never, ever sinned, raise your hands. You can't see as well as I can up here, but not one hand came up. But we, too, are anointed by God, in baptism, in our faith; and there lies why David's whole story is so important – crucial, in all the senses of that word - to Christians: we are both human and forgiven.

Take David's caring qualities: then think of Jesus's teachings. Jesus tells us to love our enemies. He tells us that the poor and downtrodden are important. He tells us to go the extra mile when someone asks us to go just one with them. He tells us to be perfect: not an indictment of our imperfection so much as a promise that we can be perfected by God's grace through Christ's sacrifice, and anyone can be used by God.

And, perhaps David is even an example of Jesus's difficult saying, repeated over and over: "The last shall be first, and the first shall be last." Isn't David the archetype of a King serving under God, the first of his flock? Yet isn't he also the least of them in so many ways in his human sinfulness. And isn't this first man in Israel also – when

reminded – the champion of the least, the oppressed, even, perhaps especially, when he, David, himself is the oppressor?

Think on these words of Paul to the church in Corinth, in 2 Corinthians 5: “So because we stand in awe of the *one true* Lord, we make it our aim to convince all people...[that] God sees who we really are... We are simply hoping that you will find a sense of joy in connecting with us. And when you are approached by others (who may value appearances more than the heart) asking questions about us, you will be able to offer an answer for them... You see, the controlling force in our lives is the love of the Anointed One. And our confession is this: One died for all; therefore, all have died. He died for us so that we will all live, not for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose from the dead. Because of all that God has done, we now have a new perspective. We used to show regard for people based on worldly standards and interests. No longer. We used to think of [Christ] the same way. No longer. Therefore, if anyone is united with [Christ], that person is a new creation. The old life is gone—and see—a new life has begun!” (The Voice, *passim*)

So. Even though David is a stupendous example of both good and bad, he is also someone in whom we can see glimpses of ourselves, thanks to the lens of the Gospel, looking at him through the cross.

In a very subtle, yet important way, there is in us, as in David, a piece of God in us, given to us by God as we were claimed by God through Christ.

Each one of us has what it takes to care as David did, and more: to emulate the care and compassion that Jesus had. We have people who feel that God has called them to do this here at Valley, and they do: but each one of us can care for others, too, no matter what we may think of ourselves, God knows what's truly in our hearts, and what is his there inside each of us.

After all, God doesn't call the qualified: God qualifies the called. None of us has even this without God's grace.

So how can you care today? Say hello to someone? Pray for someone? Make a phone call? Pay a visit? Spend some of your precious time just telling someone they're important – to you and to God?

Let's read our lesson, from David's Psalm 103, together:

Now go and honor God.