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David V: Pomp and Consequence –

(2 Samuel 13-19, excerpts; 23:2-4)

Anyone read all seven chapters?

Those of you who were here last week had the blessing of hearing Pastor Diane’s incredible sermon on David’s adulterous and murderous relationship with Bathsheba, and you know something of how complex David was. As Diane put it, David sinned on a magnificent scale, but he also loved God mightily – and God loved him.

David is just one of several figures in Scripture that exhibit those extremes – Jacob and Paul, for a start – but there are far more whose stories tell us about how God used them despite themselves: those who sinned some, and sort of loved God. But God used them all – uses them, uses us, when we let Scripture read us as we study it.

The apostle Paul writes in his second letter to Timothy, “All Scripture is inspired by God...” For Paul, writing right then, “all Scripture” was what we now know as the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures. We Christians have since included a lot more in what we now call Scripture, our Bible; but it is important to keep in mind that the

big, fat, often hard to understand first three-quarters of our Bible is also *our* heritage, *our* foundation, the beginning of the story that bursts into flower in Jesus Christ, and continues on in our lives today.

Diane and I chose to devote such a long time to David for many reasons, among them, that we Christians (and Jesus) refer to him a lot; that Scripture tells us over and over that it's important that Jesus be seen as a descendant of David; and that David's story has important insights into our own stories.

But there's an important question to ask that goes before that: why did God choose to tell us so much about this one man? Two answers, for me at least: one, the fact that these events remain in the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles are serious evidence of God's hand in Scripture. We modern-types are used to talking trash about our leaders, even writing books about their personal lives, reading into them their motives for momentous decisions: that just wasn't done back in David's day. What we have in Scripture is the kind of material that people writing "official" histories took great care to leave out. And second, why did God tell us so much about one man? Because David tells us so much about ourselves – and about how, in Christ, God is at work in us.

So, borrowing from the Super Bowl's winning quarterback Russell Wilson's motivation, after being told over and over that he wasn't big

enough, tall enough, fast enough... if God works through David all manner of wonderful things, “Why not you?”

David’s story is long and complex, but the chapters we’re using as background for this message, 2 Samuel 13-19, are especially so. We’re going to refine them to just one thread today.

But first, another question: How many of you were the perfect parent? Or, had the perfect parents? Have perfect children? *Were* perfect children? Then we should be able to relate to David as Dad.

One of the complications here is plural marriage – David had many wives and concubines. We think sibling rivalry and relationships are complicated now – think of what they had to contend with!

David had at least nineteen sons by at least seven wives, more by his concubines, and also daughters, though only one is named, Tamar. David’s oldest son, heir apparent, was named Amnon. Two of his children by another wife were Absalom – said to be the handsomest man in Israel, whose hair, when he had it shaved once a year, weighed over a pound – and Tamar, a very beautiful young woman.

Here’s the story: Amnon falls in lust with Tamar. In concert with one of his scheming cousins, Amnon hatches a plot to get himself alone with her, and when she tries desperately to resist him, Amnon rapes his half-sister – horrible enough for us today, absolutely devastating in that culture. Tamar was not only violently raped, but lost her life, for it was

impossible to recover from the shame, humiliation, and ostracism that followed, even for the daughter of the great King David. She retreats to live out her days in her brother Absalom's house.

The only thing that could make the situation worse was that although David is furious, he does *absolutely nothing*. Nothing. Amnon is his oldest son: that's the only reason given for David's refusal not just to act, but even to chastise him.

Absalom, Tamar's brother and Amnon's younger half-brother, cannot bear this horror, so after stewing about it for two years, he kills Amnon in an attempt to revenge his sister. David is angry about this, too – but again, does nothing. Absalom flees Jerusalem, just in case: David, though again angry, does nothing. It takes David's greatest general, Joab, through a bit of trickery much like what the prophet Nathan did in order to get David's attention about his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, to convince David to allow Absalom back to Jerusalem, three years later.

Even then, David won't bring himself to see or speak to Absalom for three more years – and then, only once. Eventually, Absalom decides to set himself up as king in his father's place. In his mind, David is not fit to be king. Absalom is handsome, popular, and a master of politics, Absalom creates a strong threat. But David, secure in his own mind, surrounded by the pomp of power, doesn't seem to notice. That

is, until Absalom's revolt drives David from Jerusalem. But even then, David can't bring himself to do much about this; when his generals, on his behalf, set off to defeat Absalom's army, David's only instruction to them is that they make sure that no harm comes to Absalom.

It turns out that the same general, Joab, who schemed to get David to let Absalom come home finds Absalom, caught by his famous hair in a tree as he was fleeing the battle on his princely mule, and kills him. The Bible says twenty thousand died that day.

But once David finds out that this son of his, whom he could not support in his quest for justice for his sister, whom he could not manage to forgive – or at least understand – in his revenge of his sister's rape and ruin, whom he could not bring himself to discipline as he openly plotted rebellion, and whom he didn't want to be harmed – though Absalom would have killed David without mercy – once David finds out that Absalom is dead, he finally realizes what his actions and inactions have done, and cries out, weeping over the death of Absalom. “O Absalom, my son, my son! Would that I had died for thee!”

It takes Joab, that same general, once more, to convince David that if he wants to keep his kingdom intact, he had better come out and congratulate his troops, because they feel that they've done wrong by loyally defending their King, and David's about to start another rebellion by being so wrapped up in himself and his sins of neglect, omission, and

commission. With the pomp, came the consequence: you lead, you be king, you get over it and be a King: for God, for your people, not yourself.

All right, are you still with me? That's seven chapters boiled down to five minutes.

My point is this: If God used this man, David, to do truly great things, things which we take for granted, like beginning the ancestral line of Jesus Christ, the gentle shepherd who loves us into salvation, why can't God use you? I certainly hope none of us has sinned as mightily as David, nor failed so mightily as a parent, nor been responsible for so much death and destruction. Yet God used him to do magnificent things, most of which he never knew in his lifetime.

So, why not you? Why shouldn't God use you just as mightily? I can't honestly think of a reason why any of us couldn't be; remember, as Jesus said, "with God, all things are possible." God may very well be using you right now.

So. Here's what we know: the words of David you find in your bulletin; the words before them, "This is the declaration of a man raised high, a man anointed by the God of Jacob, a man favored by the strong one of Israel." We know that that favored man was, in so many, many ways, flawed far beyond our comprehension, yet God used him in mighty ways so that we could sit here and reap the harvest of God's gift

of salvation and even be used by God, in God's time and in God's way, to do great things.

Here is the key: one thing that sets David apart is his range of personality: he did pomp and ceremony really well, but let them and the structure that goes with them detach him from his people – remember he started as a shepherd boy – but he also had the ability to break through that, to realize he did begin as an ordinary shepherd boy, the youngest brother, and admit – too often, too late, and at someone else's expense – his sinfulness, his humanity, his need for forgiveness. He may have been pompous and distant, but he was also humble and contrite.

So, why did God tell us so much about one man? David's story is a strong reminder of how dangerous it can be to become complacent, and lose sight of God. As the ancient Christian prayer of confession says so well, “merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word and deed, by what we have done, and what we have left undone...” How's that fit you?

And God forgives. So, why can't God use you? Why NOT you? Be bold, and do something today that will give glory to God, that will help a hurting world know more of the God who sacrificed his own son for us in Jesus Christ.