

Unity with a Center in God

Sermon by Pastor Patrick Fish
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Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Look, we are your bone and flesh. ²For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The LORD said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel." ³So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. ⁴David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. ⁵At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.

⁹David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inward. ¹⁰And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him.

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10 (NRSV)

Grace and Peace to you from God, who empowers people to lead. Who desires and intends for all of us to be unified. Unified with our center in God. Amen.

Move 1: Blueberry Story

My best friend is Jerod. We have lots in common. He's also a pastor serving in Shakopee, Minnesota. He loves sports. I love sports. We both have a passion for seeing love experienced not just in the home but in every home. We both are addicted to similar shows on Netflix. And both of us have always bonded over being the oldest in our families. Or, as I state it, being the guinea pigs who pave the way for what works and doesn't work.

And Jerod has the best story of when he became an older brother.

Jerod was adopted from South Korea. And for three years, he was the king of the Freeberg home. His parents showered him with so much love. He was the center of the world. Everything revolved around Jerod. Aunts, uncles, grandparents, mom and dad. They all adored that little cute kid.

Then came the news that his mom and dad were going to have another child.

Everyone was thrilled for the new addition. Everyone, that is, except my buddy Jerod. His parents tried to pull out all the stops. They got books explaining how fun it would be to be a big brother. They explained how this was going to be his baby, too. But, Jerod liked the attention. He liked this set up. He liked being king of the house. Why change it with some drooling baby?

The day came when Kory was born. And Jerod stayed back with his grandparents for those few days. When his mom and dad brought baby Kory home, now four-year-old Jerod locked himself in his room. He refused to come out. He pouted for a few hours. Finally, Jerod emerged from his room.

He went to his new baby brother and parents and said, "Fine, I will love the baby. But I'm not calling him Kory. I'm calling him Blueberry."

Little Jerod was willing to give up some of his power. But, to do so, he had terms.

It's funny now because Jerod and Kory are super close. After Easter, I took a vacation to see Jerod and Kory because all three of us are good buddies now. But, for a while there, things were a little dicey in the Freeberg home.

For the Fish family, battles and arguments between my younger brother and me always seemed to center on one thing: Legos.

Specifically, my younger brother messing and playing with my Legos instead of his own. My parents understood there was no such thing as community chest of Legos. I had mine. My brother had his. Well, that was the agreement. Those were the terms.

Yet, constantly, when we were little, we were fighting because my brother stole pieces from my Legos sets. Or, if I'm being completely fair, when I would steal pieces from his sets.

One of our biggest fights happened when I assembled a Star Wars ship that was actually my brother's set, but it had just been sitting there for weeks. I knew it was his, but I justified building the ship because if Joe really wanted to assemble it he would have already.

Power grabs. Power struggles. That was much of my childhood. Trying to be king of the house and not be bullied by the king on the playground at school or on the bus.

Move 2: Scripture

We continue this weekend in the Hebrew Scriptures. We've been following the rise of David to power. A great story of how God can transform any person's story from rags to riches. From powerless to powerful. From pointless to purposeful.

David was the youngest in his family. The runt. Back then, that meant he was guaranteed nothing in his family in terms of power or inheritance.

He's out tending the sheep when the prophet Samuel calls him in and anoints him as the next King of Israel. Shepherd boy turned into the future king.

David has struck down Goliath with his sling and stones. Gained the respect and admiration of the Israel people whom he saved from combat. His friend Jonathan and mentor, Saul, have died. David is mourning these losses in his life. And mixed in with his grief over his friends, is fear.

Because David knows that Saul's death signifies a shift in power. David knows he must take up the mantle and lead. No longer is it some far out, distant idea that he will be king. It's now. It's a present reality. It's his time to carry out the responsibility of being king and mending the kingdom.

Will he be a good king? Will he be just? Will he unite the people? Will he protect the least of those he is called to rule? Could this shepherd, slinger become the king people needed?

That's where our story for today picks up.

The people of Israel come to the city of Hebron, which is an important city on the West Bank. This is the city where Abraham settled when he entered the land God promised to him and his descendants. Joshua and Caleb have history at this place. This is the city where David sought refuge when he was running from Saul over their power struggles.[1]

Hebron was a special place throughout the Old Testament. It held a special place in David's heart, as this was a place he experienced welcome, protection, and shelter from danger. And it is here, in Hebron, where the twelve Israelite families and tribes unite together. To be one Israel. One nation. An incredible, public moment. For David. For God's people.

The people acknowledge that God has anointed David to be their shepherd and protector from the wolves of the world. The elders elect David to be their king. And David makes a covenant with the elders and people to serve as their leader and king.[2]

We start with David, alone, mourning. He is grieving two figures who were seen as rivals to the throne. We end with this public coronation of David. A united kingdom celebrating David becoming the people's choice to be king.[3]

And for forty years, David reigned as King of Israel. A people once scattered and divided were brought together to be united as one people through the leadership of David.

Move 3: The full story of David

It's easy from these verses to glorify David. We tend to do this with public figures. Put them up on pedestals. Hold them up as ideals to try to become.

But we forget that every person is simultaneously saint and sinner. No man or woman is perfect. No man or woman is all bad. And David was no different. The good news is that God never wavered on his love for David. Even though David may have fallen numerous times, God never lost faith in his people or in David.

David's reign and rule was complicated. He had lots of successes like "unifying the 12 tribes of Israel, organizing Israel's worship, and bringing the ark to Jerusalem. But, he also had lots of failings too. His accumulation of wives and concubines, the process of making Bathsheba his wife, and the ruthless ways he went about conquering his enemies."^[4]

David's first act as king was to conquer Jerusalem. Interesting enough, those are the verses the Lectionary omits from today's 2 Samuel 5 reading. Maybe it's because we don't like to see David in this way.

Verse 5 explains the length of David's rule: seven years in Hebron; thirty-three in Jerusalem. Then there is a gap. We pick up in verse 9, which describes David occupying some mystery stronghold and calling it the city of David.

This occupation, this stronghold that David renames is the city of Jerusalem. Which David conquers. His first act after being crowned king. After uniting the people. His first act is to kill those who oppose him.

As I said, his reign is complicated.

The Jebusites are living in Jerusalem. And they mock David, thinking their city is impenetrable. David shows his military expertise by defeating the Jebusites. But David is vengeful even after defeating the Jebusites. He states the blind and lame who fought against him cannot come into the house of the Lord. David excludes those who opposed him from the Temple.^[5]

While David did incredible things for God's people, he was a flawed leader like all human leaders are.

He united a people in Hebron. But he also conquered a people in Jerusalem. Through the tale of these two cities, we see the complicated nature of David's reign and rule.

Move 4: Claim your full story

We don't have to erase the story of David completely. Nor do we have to put an asterisk by his name. But I do believe it's important to recognize the full story of David. Because I think that it is more relatable. And it actually points to God's greatness and faithfulness through it all.

We all have a story. My hope is we aren't bashful about our stories. That we claim our *full* story. Not one person in this room has a perfect story. Each of us has a burden we carry that we don't fully understand.

All of us have fallen. And all of us have had moments when we rose to the occasion. We have had moments we'd relive in a second. And we have had moments we'd erase in a second.

We, as a society, have a tendency to hide our full story. Not claim some pieces of our story because they are too hurtful or they show a side of us we don't want the world to see. But the truth is that God claims *all* of us. Your whole story. The good, bad, and ugly. God claims all of you.

Throughout the whole story of David, God's grace was present. The greatness that David grows in isn't that he's a perfect leader; it's that he understand God is faithful, just, and loving even when David isn't.^[6]

Through your whole story, God's gift of grace has been present. God has been faithful. God is with you in all of it. Never abandoning you. Never leaving you. Always seeking after you. Always seeking for your heart and God's heart to be united as one. Always desiring for us, as a faith community, to be united as one community, gathered in love, freed by grace, and sent to be God's hands and feet in the world.

Move 5: Legos

We don't worship people. We don't follow people. We worship and follow Christ.

Our unity isn't in the leadership of a select few people. Our unity is in Christ. That's always our center. That's the reign we seek to live under. The Kingdom and rule that Jesus brought. We are called to continue that reign here on earth.

To lead as Jesus led in making this house a house of prayer, not one of power. To include rather than exclude the blind and lame who come to our doorsteps.^[7]

Unity just for unity's sake isn't unity. It's disingenuous.

We seek unity with God. Unity with a foundation in Christ. With God's love, mercy, and justice leading us forward.

That's what brings healing. That's what this world needed at the time of David and continues to need today: unity with a center in God.

Each of you upon arriving today received a Lego piece. It's a reminder for you this week. A reminder that you have a story. A full story that God claims. We are each one piece of God's set. A piece that has purpose. That has meaning. That, with God, we can do amazing things.

But we aren't pieces alone. We are united in community. Designed to come together to be a part of something greater.

We are individuals and people united together with one center. With our center firmly planted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Resources:

- [1] Wines, Alphonetta. "Commentary on 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10." Workingpreacher.org. July 8, 2018.
- [2] Giere, Samuel. "Commentary on 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10." WorkingPreacher.org.
- [3] Garber, David. "Commentary on 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10." WorkingPreacher.org.
- [4] Wines, Alphonetta. "Commentary on 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10." Workingpreacher.org. July 8, 2018.
- [5] Giere, Samuel. "Commentary on 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10." WorkingPreacher.org.
- [6] Wines, Alphonetta. "Commentary on 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10." Workingpreacher.org. July 8, 2018.
- [7] Giere, Samuel. "Commentary on 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10." WorkingPreacher.org.

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