

While the world seeks revenge, God always seeks reconciliation and restoration

Sermon by Pastor Patrick Fish
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Pentecost 12
2 Samuel 18:5-6, 15, 31-33

*Grace and peace to you from God,
who is our parent always seeking our wellbeing.
Always desiring relationship.
Always bringing restoration.
Amen.*

Move 1: Recap back to story of David

This weekend, we return back to the Hebrew story of King David. I want to catch us up and take a moment to reflect back on where we are in the timeline of David's life and reign as king.

Last time we heard from David, he was inflicting violence against Uriah and selfishly misusing his power in order to be with Bathsheba. David did what God predicted all human kings would do: seek self over serving others.

Well, God did not stand for this behavior by David and sent Nathan as a messenger to speak to David. The prophet Nathan was direct and told David, "You are the man." You are the man that has done a horrible injustice and you need to repent. David agreed and responded with repentance.

Since David initiated this relationship with Bathsheba and abused his power, violence seems to follow and find him. [1]

The son he had with Bathsheba was killed. David grieved deeply over the loss of this innocent child.

David's oldest son, Amnon, raped his half-sister Tamar. And rather than seek restitution, David hesitated and decided to do nothing. He didn't punish his oldest son or seek justice for what happened. Instead of being a king, David was an idle bystander to the whole thing.

This didn't sit well with family in David's house. It created a huge division, and David's other son, Absalom, took it upon himself to seek vengeance and avenge what happened to his sister. So, Absalom killed Amnon.

Absalom then fled into exile. After a while, David decided to let Absalom return, but the family dysfunction only escalated from there.

Absalom declared and promised that he was a more just man and would be a better king than David. So began Absalom's counter campaign against his father, vying for prominence to lead the nation of Israel.

And what once was a family dispute, a divided house, became a divided kingdom. Absalom's anger toward his father turned into a pursuit for power and thrust for the throne.

On one side, we have David's army and people. On the other, there's Absalom's army and people. Full on civil war. Once father and son, now David and Absalom are adversaries and rivals.

This is what God is dealing with. This is what God is sorting out. This mess. This chaos. And this is where we enter today's story.

Move 2: Scripture

Top military officers are advising David that he needs to stay back, that the king cannot join the battle. For if David was killed, the nation would split forever. So David agrees. But not without a few words to his top general, Joab. Remember Joab is David's right-hand man. Joab is the guy who gets things done, but you don't want to ask how.

David commands his guy. Gives orders to his generals not to harm his son. To deal gently with Absalom.

This must have sounded interesting. Here these men are all putting their lives on the line. They are strategizing how to defeat their opponent, to kill as many as possible with the least amount of casualties. One would think the king would give a command like, "No mercy." Or give a blessing, "I pray God protects you."

Instead, we hear David's concern not for his troops, not for Joab, but for his enemy. Absalom. The traitor. The catalyst who has started this war and begun this whole conflict in the first place.

This is who David is chiefly concerned about. David wants Absalom's army to be defeated but Absalom to be spared. David is still hoping to repair and mend his relationship with his son.

Here, David is not speaking as a powerful, got-everything-together king. Here, David is a vulnerable parent. Praying that things were different with his child. Wondering what he could have done differently.

Well, the battle ensues between David's army and Absalom's army. And it's no contest. David's army crushes Absalom's army. Thousands killed. Terrible violence. Men killing men for power and land. Showing again our tendency, as humans, to seek vengeance rather than reconciliation.

After the battle, word comes to Joab that Absalom is stuck in a tree. Joab arrives with ten other soldiers and kills Absalom.

Joab had heard David's concerns. Heard his command not to harm Absalom. Yet Joab takes matters into his own hands. He does what he thinks is best for the people of Israel. The conflict had started with Absalom, and Joab figures it would end with the death of Absalom.

Yet doing so directly opposes David. The king.

Word gets back to David that his army has won. The rebellion, the counter-campaign against David's throne is finished. David has been delivered from the powers against him. The messenger who presents the news does so in a congratulatory manner.

Yet, again, David doesn't respond how one might expect the King to do so. He doesn't ask about the troops. He asks about his son. And upon hearing that Absalom has been killed, David weeps and grieves, wishing he could take his son's place.

We start with David's concern over the well-being of his son. Even though Absalom is actively trying to undermine his father, a father's love never dies or diminishes. We end with David mourning and lamenting an experience no parent should ever experience: the death of his child.

This is a tragic story. One filled with violence upon violence. And the natural question is: What do we do with this story? What can we learn from the story of David and Absalom?

Move 3: Application of text to today

It's no secret that David is imperfect. He's a flawed king and flawed parent.

Yet his compassion and love for his son is so evident in our story. Even through the strained and tense relationship, David cares for Absalom's well-being. This is striking and something to ponder upon.

Similar to the time of David and Absalom, we continue to wage war against one another. We continue to be at war amongst our own self. As fallen humanity, we sin in thought, word, and deed.^[2] Violence besets more violence. It keeps snowballing.

When violence or evil knocks at our door, for most of us, our first thought is, 'I hope they get what's coming to them.' Or we seek vengeance in some capacity, like Joab. Or like Absalom to his older brother, Amnon.

In our story, Joab follows his own path. Not the one God or David intended. When forces of evil find us, we have a tendency, like Joab, to form our own path. That which we see as just and fit.

And despite all that—despite our tendencies for violence; despite our sinfulness to turn away from God's way and follow our own—God is still that caring and loving parent. Much like David for his son, Absalom.

This whole story reflects God's relationship with humanity.

We hurt one another. We seek self. We mess up. And yet God doesn't stop loving us.

God is that Eternal Parent who never gives up. Who is always concerned about our well-being. Who desires "fullness for each of us. Who desires to hold us from the forces of evil."^[3] Who wants restoration for our lives.

God is the Parent sent his only son Jesus to bring restoration to all of us. To free us from ourselves. To give us new life.

Jesus was sent to reveal the gospel that breaks the chains of violence. ^[4] He revealed that the way to abundance is grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Move 4: God enters our mess

David's home is a mess. David's kingdom is a mess. He himself is a mess upon hearing his son is gone.

But the good news we embrace again today is that God always enters in our messes. There's no mess too big or mess too much that God can't handle.

King David couldn't mend the broken relationship between himself and his son. He couldn't save Absalom from the sword.

But, with God, death isn't the end for Absalom. Nor for us.

Grief and pain were not the final words for David. Nor for us.

We have hope. For we have a God who enters into our messes. Who doesn't sit idly by while we suffer. Who doesn't create chaos to test us or build character.

No, we have a God who sent Jesus so we would live differently. So that we would know a different way other than violence. A way of peace, brotherhood and sisterhood.

Jesus reveals God's heart. Reveals the eternal Father. Proclaims that no one is excluded from God's love. Shares in God's grief to the lost sheep of his flock. Promises that no mess is beyond repairing.

Move 5: Doodle and video

I want to illustrate this with a short video.

Video: "Our Mess, God's Masterpiece"
Illustrates that Jesus wants to make something beautiful out of our life's messes, that God wants to make our lives his Masterpiece.

To close, I would ask you to get out the blank Post-It note you received when you came in. I don't want you to write any words on it. I just want you to doodle something random.

Keep this with you this week. May it be a reminder that your mess is never too much for God. With God, any person can be restored. Any relationship can be restored. Whether that's having a better relationship with yourself, with God, or with others.

I pray you hear God wants that for you.

I pray you know God loves you and God deeply cares about whatever mess you are in at the moment.

You are God's masterpiece. Always and forever.

Amen.

Resources:

[1] Brooks, Gennifer Benjamin. "Commentary on 2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33." Workingpreacher.org. August 12, 2018.

[2] Brooks, Gennifer Benjamin. "Commentary on 2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33." Workingpreacher.org. August 12, 2018.

[3] Brooks, Gennifer Benjamin. "Commentary on 2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33." Workingpreacher.org. August 12, 2018.

[4] Klein, Ralph. "Commentary on 2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33." Workingpreacher.org. August 9, 2015.

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