

"God Saves"

June 10, 2018

Scripture: 2nd Samuel 1:1 and 17-27

¹ After the death of Saul, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag... ¹⁷ David intoned this lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan. ¹⁸ (He ordered that The Song of the Bow be taught to the people of Judah; it is written in the Book of Jashar.) He said: ¹⁹ Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places! How the mighty have fallen! ²⁰ Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon; or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice, the daughters of the uncircumcised will exult. ²¹ You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor bounteous fields. There the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, anointed with oil no more. ²² From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, nor the sword of Saul return empty. ²³ Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. ²⁴ O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you with crimson, in luxury, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. ²⁵ How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your high places. ²⁶ I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. ²⁷ How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

Let us pray...

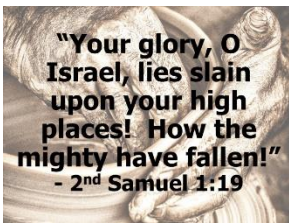


What do people fear the most in life? Other than death, we fear change the most. With change comes fear – fear of the unknown, fear of losing something or someone, fear of things being different. Often with change there is a sense of loss.

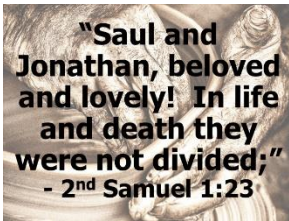
Sometimes when we are in the midst of change, especially when it is change forced from outside, we feel a sense of despair and we are ill at ease. In some ways, the feeling of despair and anguish that wash over us as we try and process change, whether corporate or personal, reminds me of Holy Week. As we journey together through Holy Week, we move from the glory of the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday on into Maundy Thursday and the Last Supper, then out to the Garden of Gethsemane, and lastly through the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. Holy Week casts a pall over us. But we know that it is not the end of the story. The world often reminds us of this during Holy Week itself. Spring is usually beginning to blossom and the buds are forming on the trees and plants. The grass is perhaps starting to green up. The dead of winter gives way to the life of spring. There is something brewing inside the earth as new life waits to spring forth. Such was the story of the tomb too, right? Jesus' body was laid to rest on Friday. But Sunday was coming. Yet, in the moments of Holy Week, we are in that place of grief. The darkness and the lament and the grief can overwhelm us.

This is the darkness in which David finds himself in today's scripture. Yes, David had his battles with King Saul and his jealousy and anger, but David loved and respected Saul as God's choice to be king. David knew that when it was God's time, he would become the next king. In the meantime, he would support and

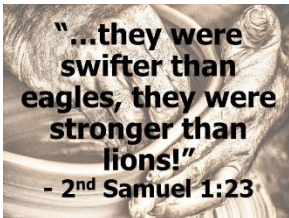
honor Saul. The loss of Jonathan was at another level, though. Jonathan was David's best friend. Jonathan had chosen loyalty to David over loyalty to his father Saul. But Jonathan was also a devoted son and dutifully followed his father Saul off to battle. Jonathan and his brothers were killed as they valiantly defended Saul as the Philistines closed in on them. The pain and grief that David felt was acute and sharp. Hear the pain again in David's lament:



¹⁹ Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places! How the mighty have fallen! ... the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, nor the sword of Saul return empty. ²³ Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were



not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.

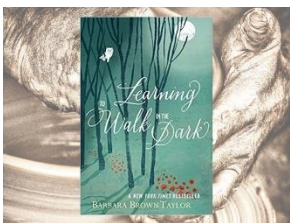
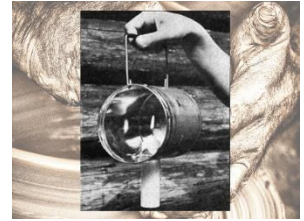


David cries out with a mournful heart. You can hear his pain in the passage today as he invites all of Israel to mourn these fallen heroes. In the midst of this moment and these feelings, it must have been hard to see how light and new life would ever be possible again.



The darkness that David must have felt this day, and the darkness that we all feel at times in this life, reminds me of the gold mine at Storm Mountain Center. How many of you

have been to Storm Mountain Center? How many of you have ever been down to the creek and gone into the gold mine? Not very far into the tunnel you begin to lose light. Often times I have been a part of a group that goes into the mine. They have these little lanterns made out of coffee cans that have a small candle in them. When you start outside the mine and light them, you can hardly see the flame in the brightness of the day. You wonder how in the world this little tin can lantern can give you light in the depths of the earth. But you plunge in and, sure enough, you can see. As your eyes adjust to the dark, the candle now seems bright. When you get to the end of the tunnel, you are about 140' inside the earth. The small room at the end of the tunnel is damp and still and quiet. As a devotional is about to be shared, we extinguish the candles. You quickly can feel the dark. You can hold your hand right in front of your face and you cannot see it. You know it is there, but you cannot see it. There in that cave, in the cool damp of the earth, in the pitch black, I am reminded of grief. Yet we also remember, that from the dark of the tomb emerged the light of the world. This promise that God revealed in Jesus is the same promise that you and I have when the darkness of this life surrounds us: God saves.



In her book *Learning to Walk in the Darkness*, Barbara Brown Taylor writes of how light or life emerges from the dark. She writes, "there in complete silence, in absolute darkness, with the smell of damp stone and dug earth in the air... sitting deep in the cave, I let it sink in: new life starts in the dark. Whether it is a seed in the ground, a baby in the womb, or Jesus in the tomb, it starts in the dark". Yet when we are in the

dark, the light can be uncomfortable. In the depth of the gold mine, when we finally relight our lanterns, the light hurts our eyes. When we are grieving or hurting, the laughter of strangers or the beauty of the spring flowers can feel like a bit of an affront. They are a little too happy, a little too joyful. Sometimes we are not yet ready to move out of the darkness.

Again, from her book, Taylor writes, "I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is really only one logical conclusion. I need darkness as much as I need light". While this concept is painful and hard to consider, it is true. This is the life that God has for us. At times life will bring hurt and change, pain and grief. It will be dark. Yet in the dark, we too learn an important thing. God saves us even there.

At other times in life, we can be walking along and others think that things are just fine. Yet we are walking in the dark. Darkness inside is something we try and conceal, we try and hide. Yet God works even in our darkness, in the secret places. Our God is always there, patiently waiting for us to feel His love. Always at work in our lives. I invite you to turn your attention to the screens to hear the story of how God was at work in Jack's life, helping him to see the light and love of his Savior, Jesus Christ. Please watch and listen.





Whether we are just “walking the walk” and going through the motions or if we have strayed from the path and are lost in our sin or whether we are in the depths of grief and pain, our God is there. God is there, at work in our lives. In the darkness, in the hurt, in the lostness, God is there. In the darkness it can be hard to see. Yet we know, from our experiences, that God is at work even there, working to redeem us, working to heal us, working to restore us. This is one of the great truths of our faith: God saves.

As we return to David in our story today, he is deep in his grief over the loss of his beloved friend Jonathan and of his king, Saul. He laments their loss and it must have seemed like a very dark time for David. But even from this place of darkness, God is at work. David turns to God and God directs David to go up to Hebron, where the men of Judah anoint David as the new king. God will remain with David, always at work in his life. David will become the greatest king that Israel has ever known. But David is human too, just like us. Even in the midst of a great reign and in spite of a deeply intimate, personal relationship with God, at times David stumbles and sins. God is at work then too. When the child is dying and David’s grief is great, God is there too. This is the promise we have as well. As children of God, God is always at work in our lives as well. At the end of the day and at the end of our lives, we hold onto this promise: God saves. Thanks be to God. Let us pray.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) When has loss led to growth in you personally or in your faith? Is this “new life” you experienced something you could share with others?
- 2) What ‘dark’ place or what dark thing are you struggling with? Pray to our God who saves for strength and relief and a path into the light.
- 3) Who do you know that is struggling with grief or change or illness? How can your experiences of God at work be helpful for them?