

Sermon Pentecost 11 B, 2021

I remember one argument with my dad when I was able to state my view and not back down. It occurred during my senior high school year. Like many seniors I was applying for university, and I had my heart set on going to London University. I wanted to be in “The City” for those college years. He wanted me to apply to go to Oxford or Cambridge. But any student on that route had to agree to stay an extra semester at high school and take the special entrance exams which were in the fall of what would be 13th grade. I flatly refused. I did get accepted to London University and loved it there. As I said initially it was one time I did not do what my dad wanted me to do. Like many dads of that era, he was very much in control of his family. Maybe you have memories of something like this happening to you?

I recalled this as I reflect on the first lesson in which we heard of King David and his family. After he had admitted his sins in his affair with Bathsheba, he had been warned family life would be traumatic. It was! You can read it many chapters in the book II Samuel. David had several wives, and each had kids so there were many half-brother/sister relationships. We are told son Ammon lusted after half-sister Tamar and tricked her into going to visit him because he was sick. Once they were alone, he raped her but subsequently threw her out. She of course was now defiled, but he did not care. Sadly, daddy David did nothing about it. Tamar’s fled to be with her real brother Absalom, who was enraged. Absalom schemed. He arranged a dinner for all his brothers, including Ammon. While seated at the table David had Ammon murdered – a quick end to that dinner party! David was told about it of course and Absalom thought it wise to flee from Jerusalem. Time passed Absalom wanted to return and was told he could, but David never invited him back to the palace. So, Absalom schemed again; he seated himself at the entrance to Jerusalem and when people arrived to see the King with problems, he sorted them out for them. He gained a following, large enough for him to set up an army of followers. He with his army planned a coup and entered Jerusalem. David, wanting to avoid civil war quickly gathered his people, those able-bodied, and fled from the city. Absalom was now in the palace where David had his harem. Absalom, we understand, had some pleasant time there. A few days later after David’s spy had successfully convinced Absalom and his army leaders to pause a few days, (David’s army needed to prepare.) Absalom and his men pursued David’s army into a large forest and so battle took place with David’s army victorious. You should note David was not allowed to be in the battle as his men wanted to be sure he stayed alive, As you heard read today, David had given instructions that Absalom should be spared, that he should not be killed. David’s general knew that as long as Absalom was alive there was still the possibility of civil war but once he was dead the uprising would fizzle out. So, he took pleasure in ensuring Absalom was dead and buried. They used a foreigner to take the news to David, both that his army was victorious as well as the news his son was dead. Did David celebrate his army’s victory and thank his troops? As you heard, all he did was mourn his son’s death, he mourned the death of the son who had caused the battle. It was a battle which need not have taken place if he has been a father to Absalom and had helped him deal with the family problems. The next verses tell you that David’s general instructed David to put aside his fatherly grief and to go out in public and thank his army. He reminded David they had fought bravely for him and there were some who had given their lives for him. David needed to thank the men who had saved his kingship and the city from further civil war.

Family life is complicated. I am sure you have not had the same experiences as David had, no multiple spouses but people change as they age, and children can bring many challenges. Of course, if you are in a second marriage with a blended family that can be very challenging.

St. Paul's words to the congregation in Ephesus are helpful here, not just for the people living 2000 years ago, but for you, too. He is reminding you to be truthful to your neighbors, not of course trying to hurt them but lying is not good either for the liar or those receiving the lies. He is telling you to be aware of how you deal with your anger. He instructs you not to sin when you are angry; don't hurt anyone or do something you will regret later. You know people often lose control of themselves when really angry and that is not a good thing. Paul is also telling you not to go to bed with out dealing with your anger. He reminds you not to say things which are in essence evil, intended to hurt someone or incite someone to hurt another. He encourages you to irradicate all the negativity in your life and instead develop a demeanor of kindness and be kind to others and live in a loving relationship with them. Just think if we all lived this way how different society would be. It really goes with Jesus basic insistence that you love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Absalom could have benefited by hearing and responding to St Paul's words, David too. Paul had of course understood that Jesus had said and lived these words. Today you heard Jesus say that he was giving all his followers the bread of life, his body, his very self. Jesus spoke of how he was giving himself for the life of the world. He was all about giving; not taking

Today in church we are including in our prayers Indigenous peoples, recognizing that those arriving in the US took land without thinking or realizing it was land that had been occupied by the Indigenous people at the time. Today we want to honor these peoples and recognize we have not respected their right to the land they had lived on before the settlers arrived. I quote from their web-site:

Today, Indigenous peoples continue to protect and remain in relationship with these relatives and will do so until the end of time. It is vital to honor these beginnings and recognize the ongoing dedication and importance of Indigenous culture within our communities and within the land that we gather, live, learn and work on.

I learned much about the lives of present-day Native Americans during my years in Minneapolis. I learned how they really did value the land they lived on, how they valued their communities and supported one another especially in challenging times. On one mission trip to a Native American area our group attended a Pow-Wow and watched how they embraced their tradition in music, dancing, and good food. But the area in which they were living was barren, void of villages, stores, garages, and any community centers. Homes were in clusters. People needed to drive long distances for even a local shop or garage for gas. They have not been treated well in Northern Minnesota. But community life was strong. On one occasion the husband of the local Native American Episcopal priest in Minneapolis participated in a 5K and suffered a heart attack and died while running. Word soon circulated in their community. For a week there were daily services in their little Episcopal church honoring his Native American heritage as well as his Christian one. After each service there was food offered in the parish hall, provided by different community members. I do not know if it was potluck or coordinated – it was always plentiful. But not all Native Americans lived in a supportive community. Many were homeless. Many were addicted to alcohol. The cathedral where I worked had plenty of grass surrounding the building which became the kitchen, dining room, bedroom, and sadly, the bathroom, for many whenever it was warm enough to be outside. Native Americans, as we now call the former Indigenous peoples have not been well treated or recognized as having special demands on and for their own land and their own communities.

In the Gospel today you heard how “the Jews” meaning the Jewish leadership disparaged Jesus accusing him of being nobody special. They could not and would not believe his claims, the claims that he was the bread that had come down from heaven. To them, he was just an ordinary poor Jewish man, like the masses. They would not and could not accept who he was. Today we must be careful not to disparage people because they are different. Maybe you can find out about Native American people in this area, the Lenape people. Maybe you can find ways of acknowledging their communities and doing what you can to honor them in some way. Jesus said he was the bread of life for all people of the world. You must remember that if you’re ever tempted to disparage another person.

Today you have been invited to recall how David failed in his fatherly relationship with his son. David failed his son and failed to honor God in the decisions he made. You have also been invited to hear the ways in which you can honor God from St. Paul by curbing your anger and developing a tender heart and love towards others. Finally, you have been reminded that Jesus is the living bread of God, and that by feeding on him, his words, his sacrificial life he will make a difference in your life and thus enable you to make a difference in the life of the world.

May all this be true for you today and every day. Amen.