

“Being Brought Back” Series - Reformation

I Kings 8:1-6, 27-30

- Pastor Ken Nelson

Most of what we remember about David, unfortunately, is that he was the handsome, daring teen who faced down and killed Goliath. Given the fact he was a musician as a young boy in King Saul's court, it's also reasonable to assume he penned a few of those ancient songs called Psalms. But David was Israel's most enigmatic figure...a man of enormous faith and perplexing weakness. He was, no pun intended, a giant in Israel, primarily for his military exploits, but also for his devotion to the God of his ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The name of David, literally, appears more often in the Bible than the name of Jesus.

David believed boldly and sinned boldly, characteristics that Martin Luther observed and even appreciated. Faith in God is not complicated, but it can be perplexing. Accompanying moments when you feel protected, motivated, comforted by your faith, are moments when you experience the full fury of a complicated world, and complicated situations. David lived long ago, but then as now, joy is joy, temptation is temptation, and frustration is common to our experience of life. David lived with frustration. A common misnomer is that David was great in the eyes of Israel because he was responsible for the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, whose dedication is described in our second lesson. He was not. He conceived of the project but circumstances around and within his realm, nearly constant war with his many enemies and a pretty ugly civil war ignited by his own son, prevented him from focusing on such a mammoth building project.

Frustration runs freely in the world today. Revolutions in Middle Eastern countries portend hope for its peoples on the one hand. But on the other frustration builds as groups dedicated to authoritarian rule the equal of what they overthrew hover over what was supposed to be the flowering of democracy. Economic news around the world is equally conflicted, riots all over Europe, what some would call them in dozens of American cities, as an increasingly frustrated middle class, squeezed by the needs of the poor on one hand and the privileges of the wealthy on the other sees no fulfilling of its dreams. Unity of purpose is elusive, frustration becomes common. King David longed to build his monument to God, but couldn't. The joy of praying over its dedication eluded him.

If we are going to live in this world, we are going to experience frustration. When plans are blocked, when some cherished project is hindered, you have to decide how you are going to respond. The biography of any one of our lives would have to include instances where we hoped, and dreamed, and planned for something that never came to pass. When you read the Bible you will discover people of faith wrestling with this very thing. Moses led Israel for 40 years through the desert wilderness. When the time came for Israel to cross the Jordan River and enter that land, the book of Deuteronomy says Moses watched from a hillside. The people enter as he dies.

Martin Luther longed for a reformed church. He died without one, at least in any significant degree. But he dealt with the resistance he encountered knowing his motives were good ones, and his labor worth it. At times tormented to find a God he could love, a God of mercy – he stepped out from under common church piety and practice, back to the source of our faith and life, the Bible, and it's honest, earthy stories. In it he found the God of David, himself such a spectacular sinner and such a determined believer.

To what do you turn when you are frustrated in life? How do you respond when they come your way? What are you going to do when our dreams and ambitions are delayed if not denied? Dreams dashed, progress slow and elusive, and frustration can cause you to give up. But, to borrow from Regis Philbin, is frustration your “*final answer*”. If we return to the sources, to the Bible, we will find that through thwarted in his desire to build a temple, David as he neared death anointed his son Solomon for the task. He acknowledged and established through prayer the aim, not the means. Faith requires that we accept that some things will be done by someone else, perhaps the next generation or the next door neighbor. That's a selfless conclusion to come to, which means that dealing with frustrations requires that we learn one other gift from the Bible, the source of our faith and life....the art of forgiveness.

You see, frustration is not just caused by the failure of another or the failure of some system, or even the success of another that denies you some. It's also caused by personal failure or weakness. And that in turn may simply be the result of personal limitations. We can't be all things to all people, and we can't be all things to ourselves either. David, and to an similar degree with Martin Luther were brilliant men, but each had their limitations. David was rash, and needed the restraint of Joab his right hand man. Luther was brilliant, but, well, a bit mouthy. He needed calmer, reasoned side of Melancthon make the reform of the church go forward. To forgive and be forgiven tells others...and not the least yourself, that with whatever your present circumstances or future prospects, you have decided to be humble, let others do for you what you can't, including be your confessor, and above all let God have the final word.

Several years ago, I went on a retreat to Assumption Abbey in Richardton. I asked to speak with the Abbot, whose name was Brian. Part of my time there was to be spent in quiet contemplation of my life and work as a pastor, and some was to be spent with Abbot Brian. He was a patient listener, Benedictines are known for that. After I poured out some of my frustrations in my callings as a husband, father and parish pastor, Brian paused, seemingly unimpressed at the nature or severity of my problems...and simply said, “*you know, none of this alters one bit God's opinion of you*”.

Looking for trenchant advice on how to balance family, personal and ministry, maybe a five point plan or something, Abbot Brian the Benedictine simply reminded me that none of my failures nor lack of accomplishment, as I may have perceived them, meant that God's love for me had been lessened one bit. This was not unlike what Luther discovered early in his career...a God who he could love...because it was a God who was not deterred by failure within us or problems around us. David knew that he would not be allowed to build the temple, but his prayer for Solomon may have been the means through which Solomon's prayer dedicating the temple became possible.

A thought worth pondering in a world so determined to judge us by our resumes and monuments, is it not? AMEN