

+ 1 Samuel 26:7-25 + Love My Enemies?? + 7th Sunday after the Epiphany + 23 February 2014 +

Who would have blamed him? For several years, King Saul had made life very difficult for David. David was no longer the young shepherd who felled the giant Goliath, but instead had become a fierce warrior with battle experience. He had served as a personal musician for King Saul. He had commanded armies against the Philistines for King Saul. He had even befriended Saul's son Jonathan and married his daughter Michal.

He had remained loyal and obedient to the king, but Saul considered David his enemy. The Lord had chosen David to be his successor. The Lord had used David to win great victories over Israel's enemies. The people loved David and were no longer so loyal to Saul, but David still served him. Saul's jealousy burned to the point that he unfairly abused the young man—throwing spears at his head when David was playing music for him, sending him into life-threatening situations, separating him from his family and friends, and unfairly forcing David to flee for his life into the desert.

David was far away **“from the presence of the LORD”** his God and surrounded by a band of mercenaries and exiles and soldiers of fortune. Even after David's exile, Saul's jealousy didn't ease up as he repeatedly tried to kill David, even though he had no moral reason to do so. Saul had sent thousands of his finest soldiers to hunt down David in the wilderness, to trap him, and to kill him, but the Lord had protected his servant and foiled Saul's plans. All the while, David showed respect and honor for the Lord's anointed, even to the point that he felt guilty for cutting off a corner of Saul's robe when the king unknowingly wandered into a cave where David and his men were hiding. Nevertheless, Saul kept hunting him.

Three thousand of Saul's finest soldiers searched for David in the desert of Ziph. David knew how untrustworthy Saul had proved to be over the years. So he sent out scouts to watch Saul's movements. When Saul's army camped for the night, David and a nephew by the name of Abishai snuck into Saul's camp. They snuck past 3,000 sleeping soldiers first through the outer circle and then the inner circle. They even stepped over Saul's sleeping commander-in-chief, Abner, when they spotted the large form of the King of Israel lying on the ground. In the darkness, Saul lay there fast asleep with his spear stuck in the ground near his head and a water jug nearby. There they stood looking at the king—an easy kill by any measure. The moment was right. Darkness covered everything with the exception of a little moonlight. The entire army slept and revenge would have been easy.

Abishai whispered to David, **“Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice.”** Revenge seemed so real, so sweet at that moment. David could've justified it as self-defense, as fighting in a just war for being unjustly attacked, as taking the kingly office to which he was anointed, but David hesitated...

Getting even comes so easily, doesn't it? Whenever you feel like you're being attacked, what's your first instinct? To respond in kind. If you feel you're being treated unfairly or unjustly, what's your first instinct? To respond in kind. If someone says something critical to you, especially if it seems personal, what's your first instinct? To respond in kind. Our natural instinct is to get even, to get revenge, to fire back physically or verbally with all the sharpness of a jagged piece of glass. It's the same whether you're a little kid tattling so Mom would come down hard on your sibling who hit you for teasing her or an adult cutting down your spouse with jagged sarcasm. There is no age difference or gender difference or racial or social difference when it comes to how we respond to those we perceive as “enemies”.

Our natural instinct is to be like Abishai. “Did you hear what he said to me? Did you see what she did to me? Well, they have it coming to them. Just let me twist the knife a little harder.” If the moment is right, we take the opportunity to attack verbally or even physically. Perhaps we do the opposite and avoid a person with the silent treatment or speak poorly about them relishing in their moments of misfortune.

The truth is, whether you admit it or not, we all have enemies in this life. Maybe it's the neighbor or family member with whom you have a long-standing grudge. Maybe it's the co-worker who takes credit for your hard work and makes fun of what you believe. At times, in a marriage, your spouse can seem like the enemy. Maybe it's the bully at school or in the neighborhood. Maybe it's someone who teaches something contrary to God's Word and undermines the Gospel so that it robs others in your life of the certainty God gives. Because we have enemies, whether we admit it or not, hatred and vengeance come easily and seem to be right, but do they ever help, ever heal, ever satisfy? They never do.

So what did David do as he stood in the moonlight over his enemy Saul? He held back Abishai's hand and said, **“Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the**

LORD lives...the LORD himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go. David was not going to raise his hand or Abishai's against the one whom God had chosen to be king. It was not his task to avenge. It was the Lord's task to carry out justice on Saul, which would eventually happen with Saul's tragic death.

David's task, however, was to love his enemy, and the next day David sought to end this hostility. Now David understood the situation and understood Saul well enough that he kept his distance, yet David showed a humble compassion for his enemy. From a safe distance, he confronted the king and his commander-in-chief and his army. ***"Why is my lord pursuing his servant? What have I done, and what wrong am I guilty of?"*** Saul acknowledged that he had sinned against David, but had proven to be so untrustworthy that David simply returned Saul's spear through a servant. They parted ways and Saul never attacked David again. David had shown compassion on his enemy, when Saul had not, and God granted peace.

His compassionate example really puts us to shame, doesn't it? We're quick to respond, quick to avenge, quick to attack, and quick to see another soul for whom Christ died as "the enemy". In reality, we forget who the real enemy is. We forget something that David did not—that our real enemy and the real enemy of those who make our lives difficult, of those who have become our enemies is Satan. Satan wants to devour them as much as he wants to devour you and me. He doesn't want reconciliation. He doesn't want any of us to repent of our sins and live in God's forgiveness. He wants each and every one of us to spend eternity in hell away from God's love.

Realizing that leads you to look at an enemy in a completely different light. As Saul was in danger of eternal death in hell, so also are our enemies. Sadly our attacks against them only make Satan's job easier. In doing so, we end up pushing that enemy farther away from repenting, from turning away from their sins, and from receiving the forgiveness they need. In doing so, we prove to be God's enemies because that hostility, sarcasm, and revenge actually flow from our natural opposition to the compassion of our God.

Now go back to the humble compassion shown by David. Why did he do it when he seemed to have every right to attack his enemy? In his compassion, we see a glimpse of the even greater compassion of David's descendant—our Savior Jesus Christ. He had compassion on a world that was utterly hostile to him, that fought against him with every fiber of its being until his dead body lay in a grave. He had compassion on those who opposed him and sought their repentance when they verbally attacked him. Even after they had beaten and ridiculed and tortured him, even after they had nailed him to a cross, he prayed for them, that they would be saved from their ignorant hatred. After his resurrection, Jesus forgave those who had abandoned and denied him. He even had compassion on you and me in spite of how quick we are to avenge and attack those who seem to be our enemies. Even though we are his enemies by nature, he still forgives us of all our sins.

...But Jesus is God. He's holy and perfect in his behavior, in his thoughts, in his love. How can you and I have the strength to love our enemies and to keep on loving them in spite of how unlovable they are? Like David, the only way is to stand firm on God's promises. You see, God had promised that David would eventually become king and that through him all nations would be blessed by his descendant Jesus. So what has God promised us? Even though we were by nature God's enemies, he has made us his children through faith in him. He has washed us clean with the saving waters of Holy Baptism. Through Jesus he has made us his children. So if he can make enemies into dearly loved members of his family, he certainly can lead us to see our earthly enemies as potential family members as well.

Whoever your enemy or enemies might be, it's important for us to remember a few things. Remember who the real enemy is—Satan. Remember how we are victorious over our enemies not through any scheming or vengeance on our part, but through Jesus who conquers our true enemy. Perhaps in his grace he will even give us the victory of reconciliation with our enemies, but even if that's not possible, we remember to see our enemies through Christ's eyes—being careful like David, yet still caring very much about their souls—and above all, we remember to stand firm on Christ's promises. We bask in his love for us and we do all we can to help preserve their time of grace with the hope that they will repent and be victorious over the real enemy along with us. With Christ's help, let's do what doesn't come naturally to us. Let's love our enemies as Christ loved us with the boundless love Christ demonstrated even to enemies like you and me. Amen.