

**+ 1 Samuel 20:12-17 + The Resurrection Life: Selfless—Not Selfish +
+ 5th Sunday of Easter + 3 May 2015 +**

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Why risk everything for a fugitive? Jonathan didn't have to do it. He had plenty of reasons not to do so. He was the oldest son of Saul, King of Israel, which also made him the rightful heir to the throne. He was wealthy. He was powerful. He was a mighty warrior respected by friend and foe alike. He had a wife and a little son. He had it all. He had so much ahead of him, yet he didn't hesitate to risk it all for his friend—the fugitive David.

There had been a time when David was highly favored in Saul's court. After all, the young man had soundly defeated the giant Philistine named Goliath with a sling, a stone, and a simple trust in the Lord. Every task the king gave to David was carried out so successfully that before long David was a high-ranking general in Israel's army. Pretty soon the people were singing David's praises more than Saul's. **"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."** (1 Samuel 18:7) Pretty soon Saul's jealousy started to burn against David and only got worse as it became clear that the Lord was with him.

So King Saul convinced himself that the best thing to do was to eliminate David some way somehow. Yes, it was true that the Lord had anointed David to be the next King of Israel, but David wasn't called to eliminate Saul or his family. Instead David faithfully served his king and even developed a strong friendship with Saul's oldest son, Jonathan. They were practically brothers.

Yet Saul's jealousy knew no bounds. When the king was tormented by an evil spirit, David was hired to soothe him by playing his harp. Instead of being soothed, however, King Saul tried to make David a human pincushion with his spear. Other times Saul sent David on suicide missions in the hope that the Philistines might take the young man out. Instead, David triumphed and his enemies fled before him. Saul even tried to use marriage to his daughter Michal as a distraction that might lead to David's death in battle, but as with all the other attempts, that failed too. The Lord kept blessing David.

No matter how much his father hated David, Jonathan remained his steadfast, loyal friend. For a time, Jonathan was even able to get his father to swear that he would stop trying to kill David, but it was only a matter of time before Saul was throwing spears at David's head once again. Michal helped David escape from her father to the home of the prophet Samuel, where only God's power kept David safe from Saul and his pursuers.

David was a fugitive because of the king's jealousy. He was innocent, but that didn't matter to King Saul. The young man was near his wit's end. His emotions, his mental health, and his spiritual health were pretty frayed.

Soon after his miraculous escape from Samuel's home, David found Jonathan. His questions came blurring out, **"What have I done? What is my crime? How have I wronged your father, that he is trying to take my life?"** (1 Samuel 20:1) At first, Jonathan didn't believe him. After all, he had gotten his father—the king—to swear that he would stop pursuing David. David wished that that were true, but the truth was **"...as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death."** (1 Samuel 20:3) Where else could David go? Where else could he hide? He didn't know.

Jonathan wasn't going to abandon his dear friend. They came up with a plan that would enable Jonathan to find out what Saul's intentions really were and report back to David. It was going to be dangerous. Saul's temper was well known because it was so deadly. For all Jonathan knew, his father might throw a spear at his head too, which he did. Jonathan assured his friend with an oath on the Lord's name, **"By the LORD, the God of Israel, I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know? But if my father is inclined to harm you, may the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away safely. May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father."** Jonathan's selfless, loyal love for his dear friend, David, moved him into action, even though that action threatened his own life.

Yet Jonathan was willing to risk even more for his dear friend David! It's not very obvious in what we're about to hear him say, but it's definitely there. **"But show unfailing kindness like that of the LORD as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family—not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth."** Jonathan, the heir to the throne of Israel, knew that David was the true, God-appointed heir to the throne. Jonathan recognized that David was his future king—and that meant that once David was in power, Jonathan would probably lose his power and authority and wealth and prestige. He'd lose everything.

Jonathan was willing to risk it all, though, because of the selfless, unfailing love that he had come to know through the Lord of free and faithful grace. Jonathan knew that grace of God intimately. Not only had the Lord given him all that was his, but he also enjoyed the Lord's selfless love that would one day be embodied in the person of the Messiah—the One who would forgive all his sins, the One who gave him peace even as his entire life was being flipped upside down, the One who would show perfect, unfailing love for him, his family, and the entire world by saving his people from sin and death.

With that unconditional, selfless, unfailing love of the Lord in mind, Jonathan urged David to show that same selfless love. David would certainly do so, but little did Jonathan realize that the Lord of free and faithful grace, God's perfect, selfless love in the flesh, would come through David's line to save a world full of selfish sinners. With Christ-like, self-sacrificing love, ***“Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David...And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.”***

Does your love look as selfless as theirs, let alone as selfless as Christ's? Would you be willing to risk everything out of selfless love for another—a spouse, a child, a parent, a friend, a co-worker, a neighbor, an enemy? Or does your love and mine usually look selfish asking “What's in it for me?”

So often my love or your love doesn't look selfless at all! Is your love always patient when you don't see things progress like you want or when others don't do what you expect? Is your love always kind to those who hurt you? Does your love ever envy those who have what you don't or ever proudly boasts of what you've accomplished? How many records of wrongs do you have tucked away in the back of your mind? Does your love always rejoice with truth? Is it ever cowardly or worried or despairing or too quick to give up? Isn't it true that our love looks nothing like that of Christ or Jonathan?

How often aren't you and I quick to point out the dreadful lack of love in our world, yet we do nothing to fill that gaping hole with our own love? How often don't we lament the horrible lack of love for the unborn or the aged or those in need, but do nothing to speak up in their defense? How often don't we bemoan the increasing number of divorces or the ongoing racial issues in our communities, but do nothing to promote God's gift of marriage or seek to provide the healing necessary? Where is that selfless love in action that Jonathan didn't hesitate to show to his dear friend David? Where is that selfless love that Jesus speaks of when he gave his disciples a new command to ***“Love one another”***? After all, if we do not show the love of Jesus, the world will not see it. If we don't show it, where will such love ever be visible in our world?

The answer is ultimately found at the cross and in the love of the Savior on that cross, because that love was for you and me too. Standing beneath the cross you and I realize that it was our sins of selfishness that put Jesus there, but it was his selfless, unfailing, undeserved love for you and me that kept him there. It was his selfless love that moved him to sacrifice everything, even his own life, for you and me. Our sad, pathetic mimicking of Christ's love for our world is forgiven at that cross and in the empty tomb.

You see, because Jesus lives, when God looks at you and me, he doesn't see so many selfish attempts to love others, but instead he sees Christ's perfect love for you and me as our perfect Substitute. Really that's how we love selflessly as Christ loved us, not selfishly as I so often love others. The apostle John once wrote, ***“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us...”*** (1 John 4:9-10)

Isn't that breathtaking? ***“God loved us!”*** That's good news! Through that good news of Christ's love, the Holy Spirit works faith in your heart, so you, like Jonathan and David, can personally experience the selfless love of Jesus. Having then experienced that unfailing, selfless love, you and I will want to share that same love of Jesus with others. You can't keep that love to yourself, because it's a love that flows from Christ through you to others as it did from Jonathan to David. That love of the living Christ has changed you forever. You have to share it. You have to put it into action, even if it means risking everything and giving priority to loving others.

So go then, and love others as Jesus has loved you. Show them the love of Christ! With that love of Jesus, love the person who rubs you the wrong way. With that love of Jesus, love the person who isn't so easy to love. With that love of Jesus, love the person who wronged you and the person sitting beside you right now. Then go home, go to work, go to school, go to family and friends, and with that same love of Jesus, love the person who could be sitting beside you next Sunday. Love one another, just as Christ so selflessly loves you. **Christ is risen! He is risen indeed Alleluia! Amen.**