

Sermon

Sunday, August 4, 2019

Charleston, SC

10:30 am Chapel & 6:00 pm Sermon ~ 2 Samuel 9:1-7, Luke 22:24-30

Mephibosheth and Radical Grace

The Rev. Al Zadig, Jr.

You may not know this, but being a reader in church is very challenging. The lay readers have to be very careful to pronounce folks on the sick list very accurately or feelings get hurt. For instance, is it Simons, or Simmons? Smith or Smythe? Normally though, it's the names from the Bible that are most painfully difficult to pronounce. This morning, I want to begin with the three most complicated names in the Bible.

Number 3 is Merodach-Baladan. This name gives nightmares to every reader. This guy was the King of Babylon and his name was originally Merod-ach, but because he loved his father Baladan so much, he just added his father's name to his name. Merod-ach-Baladan. Nik, if you play your cards right, Charlie might adopt that trait, and in a couple of years he might want to be called Charlie-Nik!

Number 2 is Mahershalalhashbaz. Imagine being on the playground, "Hey, Maher-Shalal-hashbaz, toss me the ball!" Yep apparently God told Isaiah to give that name to his son. Heaven only knows why.

Number 1 is from today's Gospel Project reading: Mephibosheth. He is the grandson of King Saul, and the son of Jonathan.

We read this morning out of the book of Samuel. Samuel tells us how King Saul became King, how he had a son named Jonathan, how over time King Saul consults with astrologers, which God condemns, and how God replaces Saul with King David. We're told that Saul rages in jealousy over David and tries several times to kill him. Yet, during that time, David becomes best friends with Jonathan, King Saul's son proving that relationships often supersede other loyalties.

David and Jonathan are best friends even though Jonathan was the rightful successor to the throne, the next in line to be King. Yet God's plans are sometimes different than human tradition as God chooses David. Jonathan knows this and is okay with it. His friendship with David was never stronger.

Quick time out. Ladies, this is one of the things you do much better than men. You nurture friendships. Men, sometimes, and as we get older, those friendships get harder and harder to maintain. In fact, let me pause here and ask, Men, do you have friends like a Jonathan, or a David? Friends that against all odds, you remain close to? I have found this to be very difficult. Many of us are full time in our workplace, and full time at home, with very little discretionary time. David and Jonathan had Godly Friendship, that lasts until one very painful day - the day Jonathan and his father Saul are killed in battle. But David, shortly before Saul and Jonathan die, makes a promise that he would bless Saul and Jonathan's offspring and their whole family line. Why? Out of Godly friendship, and to honor them.

And that brings us to today's Chapter 9 reading. David is now King, and God reminds David of the promise he made to be kind to Saul's family. David says to his staff, "Okay, who is Jonathan's next of kin so I can fulfill my friendship promise?" His team comes back in the oval office the next day with the name...Mephibosheth. Saul's grandson. Jonathan's son. So David commands the guards to bring Jonathan's son front and center.

Here is the download on Mephibosheth. Back on the day Saul and Jonathan die, Mephibosheth is 5 years old, and is being babysat by his nanny. When the Nanny gets

word about the fate of Saul and Jonathan, she picks up Mephibosheth and sprints out of the house, but as she's running she trips, and Mephibosheth falls and breaks his legs. They never healed right and Mephibosheth becomes crippled. Not just physically crippled, but crippled in fear. You see, in those days when a King was defeated, the army of the new king would come and kill every descendent of that king. Why? To prevent another family member from revenging the new King and to prevent a coup. It normally went like this. King A defeats King B. First act of New King A? Murder every descendant of King B, then literally, feed their bodies to the dogs. Mephibosheth lives in crippling fear of being fed to the dogs. If you're Mephibosheth, you are hiding, praying not to hear that knock on the door. And then that day comes. Knock, knock, knock. Guards come to collect him. It's D-Day. Mephibosheth is terrified. Imagine what he look like. He's probably wearing a shirt with yesterday's breakfast on it. His hair is worse than a mop. His beard has critters living in it. And the stench from his feet is worse than any bad diaper in here!

Mephibosheth tells his world goodbye. And as he appears before David, that's when the most shocking event of his young life happens. What David is about to say to Mephibosheth is perhaps the most incredible example of Radical Grace in the Old Testament. David turns and says, "Mephibosheth, don't be scared. I've come to bless you. To begin with, I'm returning to you all the properties of your grandfather Saul. Furthermore, from now on you'll eat with me at my table."

SILENCE. David may just as well have injected Mephibosheth with Novocain. He is numb. All of that real estate his? All that income from the properties? Having a place

at the King's table, just like King David's sons? As it settles in, the Bible says Mephibosheth, this shaggy crippled man, drops to his knees and, with tears in his eyes, looks to David and says, "Who am I that you should notice a crippled dead-dog like me?" David didn't have to say a word in response.

What David just did was the very definition of radical grace. Radical Grace can be defined as giving someone not what they deserve, but what they need. It's one-way unconditional love.

Have there been times in your life you've been the David? You've extended radical grace in a way that brought blessing and power to another? Have there been times in your life when you've been the dead dog Mephibosheth? You had nothing, no leverage, crippled emotionally, perhaps from betrayal, but someone became David to you? Mephibosheth, an enemy of David, who through radical grace, became the blessing of David.

Did you know it was because of another Fall that we became enemies of God? Because of Adam and Eve and original sin, we began as enemies of God. In Colossians 1, Paul writes, "Once you were enemies of God because of evil. But God has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through his own death to present you holy in his sight without blemish." Here is the eternal truth: because of original sin, the Fall of Man, we are all Mephibosheth. Through His death on the cross, Jesus has taken us crippled folks, crippled by sin, sadness, regret, and brokenness, and said, "Don't be frightened. I've come to bless you. I will give you all you need in your life, I'm with you. Furthermore, from now on you'll take all your meals at my table, now and for eternity. Where when I look upon you, you are not crippled anymore! You are my beautiful sons and daughters, receiving the most precious gift I could give you, my very own body and blood at my table." Yes, taking Jesus up on His offer to come to his table, Sunday by Sunday to eat with him, receiving his body and blood as strength to forgive and be forgiven. Radical grace.

Do our jaws drop at this, or are we so used to it that it has lost its meaning? The more we acknowledge our own sin and wretchedness, the more powerful we see the radical grace of Jesus in our life! Mephibosheth, like us, did

nothing to deserve kindness. But to attain it, Mephibosheth had to accept it. Which takes us to three important takeaways from the life of Mephibosheth.

First, we can refuse grace. It's possible that Mephibosheth could have refused the radical grace of David. Mephibosheth could have said, "David you could give me all the riches of the kingdom, but I'm going to live with the leverage I have of being angry at you for causing every bad thing in my life. I'd rather live as a cripple."

Have you ever said that to God or another person? It's possible because strangely, sometimes the Mephibosheth, stench of our lives, can be strangely comforting. It's ours, it becomes our reason for living. Oh it feels good to live our lives against something. We might even have family members or neighbors who refuse grace because accepting the grace ends the feud and sometimes we just don't want that feud to end!

Yes, grace can be refused. Grace offered by Jesus can be refused. Sometimes we can keep Jesus at a distance, afraid that if we accept his grace, our life will become boring, churchy and sanitized? Actually, it becomes the opposite! Exciting, forgiven, real, and even messy! Today is the day I pray you will join me in the spirit of Mephibosheth and say, "Lord, who am I that you should love, notice, and redeem a crippled dead dog like me? I accept your radical grace." Takeaway one – accept it!

Second, this radical grace is meant to be given away. As a family we went to the Lion King movie Thursday night, and the place was packed! That one line by Mufasa got me again, turning to his son he says, "While others search for what they can take, a true King searches for what he can give." Jesus teaches us that in giving us grace, giving us what we need – eternal life, and not what we deserve – eternal death. We have to give that away. So, who are the Mephibosheths in your life who need grace from you? If you're wondering who these folks are, here is a profile. They are the hard hearted, unlovable, grace-less ones. They deserve to be isolated forever from you. But Jesus is saying don't give them what they deserve, but through the Holy Spirit, give them what they need: life, forgiveness, and a new beginning. Don't give up on them!

Are you refusing the grace of Jesus? Who are the Mephibosheth's you need to offer radical grace? Finally, it will cost you something. You are taking a risk. You see, for all David knew, Mephibosheth could have been an even more violent version of Saul. David took a risk, and knew it could be costly. As it was for Jesus, who paid the cost with his life when he was executed on the cross. Every time you show his grace to another through the Holy Spirit, a part of you will die, it will sometimes be excruciating, as if someone had cut off a part of your arm, your heart, or your leg. But here's the crazy thing. As like Jesus, part of you dies, Jesus in that moment is re-making you into his image. Don't refuse it, my friends. Find ways to give it. And know that as you do, you are entering a surgery that will help you live, look, and love like Jesus.

Final thought. You know, unlike Mephibosheth, some of us may not have complicated names, but most of us have complicated histories and crippling hurts and fears. Allow the grace of Jesus to seat you at His table, forgiven, free, and healed.

- Receive it
- Give it
- Bear it.