

Scripture Readings and Sermon

July 4, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

While it is normally pointed out that the split between the tribe of Judah/Benjamin in the south and the northern ten tribes of Israel occurred after the death of Solomon (1 Kings 12), these two areas where actually split during Saul's reign. It is David who unites all the tribes into one kingdom. That is why it says "all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron". Hebron is the ruling center of Judah/Benjamin. David is anointed "king over Israel" for forty years and rules "over all of Israel and Judah for thirty-three years". These numbers are also important. At the age of thirty, "All those who were enrolled of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron and the leaders of Israel enrolled" became qualified to begin service. (Numbers 4:46-47) {Note: this is the reason most scholarship says that Jesus began preaching at the age of thirty} The use of forty to indicate the length of David's rule is connected to the symbolic meaning of forty as "long enough". It rained forty days and forty nights - it rained long enough to flood the earth. They wandered forty years - they wandered until a new generation was ready to enter the promise land. Forty is when God decides it is long enough. The total of seventy is associated with completeness - seven days of creation, forgiving seventy times.

2 Samuel 5:10 And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him.

Where does greatness lie?

Thinking of "great" historical figures, why were they great?

Was it because of military victories or because of their faith?

Do we define "great" based on the world or on the Spirit?

Do we use the word "saint" to mean "great"? Why do we separate the two?

Commentary on 2 Corinthians 12:2-10 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Drawing to the end of his letter, Paul once again brings up this theme of treasures in clay pots. After a brief speculative diversion into the nature of heaven which is only used as an illustration of someone whose treasure was revealed, Paul returns to the fragility and weakness of our earthen vessels. Paul begins to complain about "a thorn .. in the flesh" which torments Paul's "clay pot". Before he descends into a "pity party", Paul shows how God turns our faults into His glory. In one of the few times Paul declares to have received a direct message from God, he writes, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." This is the heart of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Power is not in material wealth, human beauty, or brilliant thoughts but in our weakness because only then to we begin to rely fully on God where true power resides. This is why the cross is foolishness to the Gentiles, because "whenever I am weak, then I am strong" in Christ.

2 Corinthians 12:9 "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."

Do you ever feel overwhelmed? Does God's grace feel sufficient?

Could faith be trusting despite what you feel?

Looking back, can you find times when grace was sufficient despite what you felt?

Why is it that we only dig deeper into faith when we are at our weakest?

Is this why it is hard for the young to find faith because they still rely upon themselves?

When did you learn that power is made perfect in weakness?

Commentary on Mark 6:1-13 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The Gospel of Mark, like the creation story in Genesis, has two very similar stories. The first story of Jesus calling the disciples, performing miracles, teaching, and being rejected is in Mark 1:16-

3:12. The second story is in Mark 3:13-6:13. After the second story, Mark flashes back to the death of John the Baptist (next week). While the first story introduces the authority of Jesus, the second story focuses on the kingdom of God that Jesus is revealing. This revelation is rejected, in the story today, by those who knew Jesus growing up. Like the ground that was too hard or the lamp hidden under the basket, the people can not see past the boy Jesus and see Christ the Messiah. Only through the disciples can the kingdom be made known. The order to "take nothing" harkens to the lesson that Paul is trying to teach about finding strength in our total dependence upon God. Jesus' recommendation to walk away from those that "refuse to hear you" is based on his explanation of parables. People can only hear when they are finally ready to listen. Only God knows the right time.

Mark 6:8 He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff

Why did Jesus make the disciples leave everything behind?

Have you ever had to rely on the kindness of strangers?

What is it like to have to trust God for your next meal or shelter?

Do some people believe that trust means an absence of responsibility?

If we depend upon God, do we not need to follow God?

Sermon "**True Greatness**" ([*Sermon Video*](#))

A recent political slogan read, "Make America Great Again". Ignoring all the politics associated with the slogan, it begs the question, "What made America great?" and "What is greatness?". On the 4th of July, these seem like important questions to ponder especially in light of the scriptures this morning.

Paul argues that he found greatness not in spiritual experiences or wisdom but in weakness. It is only at his weakest points that he discovered that it was God's strength alone that held him up. True greatness comes not from human strength but from God. It is when God's will shines forth through human action that true greatness is discovered. It was when volunteers came together to stand up for their freedom as children of God against the tyranny of another person that a shot was heard around the world at Lexington and Concord. It was the willingness to do what ever it took so that others might have freedom from want and fear and freedom to speak and worship that formed that "Greatest Generation". Greatness came not from military power or economic success but a deep faith in the freedom of all God's children which Christ bought on the cross. It is when the spirit of a people or nation finds strength not in themselves but in God that great things happen.

Unfortunately, when great things do happen people often point to themselves rather than God. They fall under the illusion that it is because of their strength, their righteousness, or their purity that great things happen. When God is revealed through the weak, the unexpected, or the "other", it is often ignored or dismissed. Jesus, the very Word of God on Earth, could do very little in his home town because of people's pride. Jesus didn't come from a wealthy family or an educated background so how could he be great. In their arrogant pride, they were blinded to true greatness. Those who in their weakness turned to Jesus found the source of not only health but life and true happiness. How often do we have to fall on our knees as individuals and as a nation until we learn that our freedom and happiness rest solely with God.

The people of Israel had been in a long civil war between the followers of Saul (and descendants) and David. In the end, David's reliance upon the LORD won the day. David could have taken the throne and crown but instead he was content to remain king of Judah. It was the people of Israel who came to David not looking for a king but a shepherd. A king relies on their own sense of entitled greatness where as a shepherd seeks the greatness of the sheep. In David, they finally acknowledge that the LORD was the only one who could choose a good shepherd to lead them. David's greatness was not in his military strength but in his heart that was humbly dedicated to God. It was only when his heart strayed that he was reminded of how weak he was without God.

As we celebrate the gift of freedom, let us remember that all freedom came to us through the cross. When others try to rob that freedom through false prophets, tyranny of fear, or illusions of greatness, men and women have stood up to defend the right of all God's children to claim the freedom Christ purchased on the cross. We have the ability to speak freely and worship openly. The only one's who keep us from proclaiming the good news of freedom is ourselves. May we remember that it is when we are at our weakest that the true greatness of God can shine forth. Greatness has never been lost. We have simply forgotten in Whom that greatness resides. As one people under God in Whom we trust, let us celebrate the greatness and wonders of God.