
My Sermon from Sunday August 8, 2021, '11th Sunday after Pentecost' ~

"Deal Gently"

Speak Lord your servants are listening. Amen.

What a gift it is to see your faces in front of me and also know that people are able to worship with us through the live-stream. This is our first Sunday morning back together with in-person worship in over 8 months. We are a family. We are the body of Christ. We walk together.

Speaking of other kinds of families ~ Comedian George Burns said this: *"Happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family. In another city!"*

All families have idiosyncrasies and some have unusual habits. There is a huge difference between traditions that define a family and patterns of behaviour that become dysfunctional.

One of the ultimate dysfunctional families was King David's. And we have an episode from his life that centres on lust, jealousy, power, greed, and murder. It is a complex story that is told throughout several chapters in the Old Testament in the 2nd book of Samuel. It begins with a rape. David had a daughter named Tamar and the Bible tells us that she was beautiful. Tamar had a brother named Absalom who was the 3rd son of David. David's son Amnon who would be a half brother to Tamar lusted after Tamar. He eventually concocts a scheme in order to be alone with her so he can rape her. Once he does this, Amnon's lust instantly vanishes and he loathes his half-sister Tamar. Tamar hides in her brother Absalom's house.

When David hears about the rape, the Bible tells us that he does nothing because he loves his son Amnon. Perhaps David is also remembering his sin of rape against Bathsheba.

Absalom hates Amnon and waits for an opportunity to avenge the rape of his sister. After 2 years of waiting, Absalom gets his servants to kill Amnon. Absalom then flees from his father David for 3 years. Eventually, David forgives his son for killing his half-brother Amnon. David is remembering his own transgressions and how he arranged for Bathsheba's husband Uriah to be killed in battle.

However, the dysfunction continues. Absalom is power hungry and tries to usurp the throne away from his father. Many of David's allies switch sides and give their loyalty to Absalom. The conflict intensifies and there is battle between David's men and Absalom's men.

David gives this instruction to the generals in charge of his army: ***"Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom!"*** (2 Samuel 18:5). And everyone clearly heard his instruction. Deal gently with my son.

At this point, King David isn't worried about losing his throne. He is only

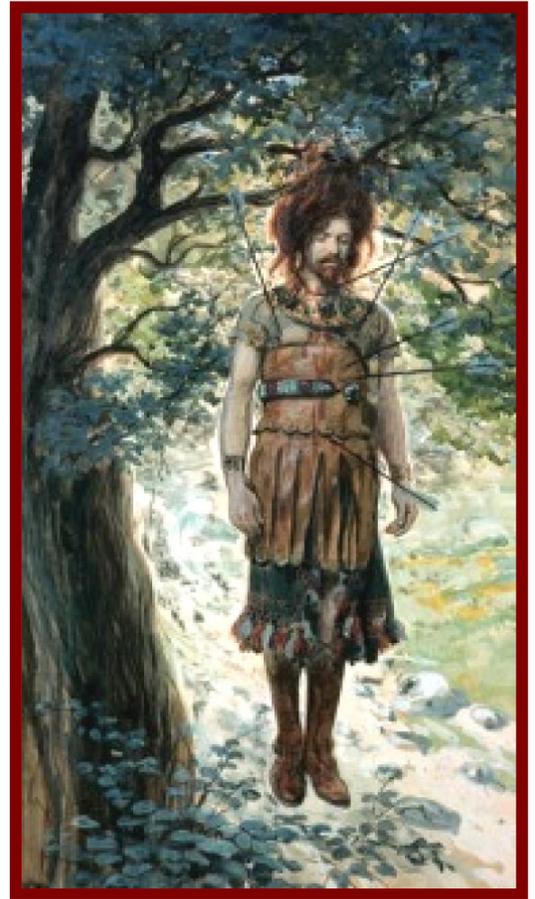


worried about his son Absalom. During the battle, 20,000 men died. The battle took place in a forest with many trees. Absalom was known for his thick and beautiful long hair. The hair is significant in this story. A few hundred years earlier, Samson lost his strength when Delilah had his long hair cut off. Now we have another story with hair.

When Absalom went under the branches of a great oak while riding on his mule in the intense battle, his long hair became entangled in the branches and Absalom was left hanging from the branches. The mule he was riding kept going.

So now we have Absalom hanging between earth and heaven. General Joab hears about Absalom and even though he knows that David told all the commanders to deal gently with Absalom, Joab cannot. After all, Absalom is the son who tried to usurp his father's throne. Joab grabs 3 spears and goes to Absalom and says, *"I will not waste time like this with you."* (2 Samuel 18:14).

Joab drives the spears into Absalom's heart and then the mob mentality takes over. 9 of Joab's men join the fight and strike Absalom over and over again. Absalom is now well and truly dead. Joab throws Absalom into a pit in the forest and covers him with stones.



Back to David who is waiting for news of the battle. He is sitting at the gates leading into Jerusalem and wondering if he still has his throne. The messenger tells David that the throne is still his but all David is thinking about is his son Absalom. Is Absalom OK? We know the answer and it is not good news.

When David finds out that his son is dead, he mourns for Absalom and cries out ~

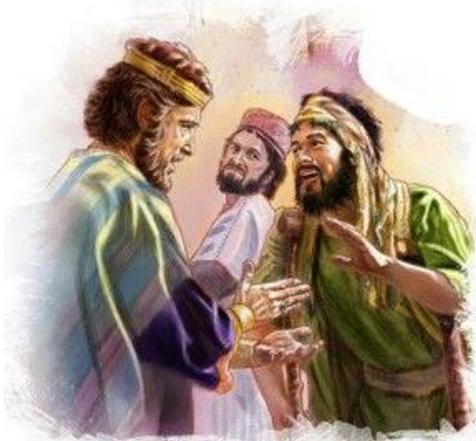
"O my son Absalom, my son, my son, would I have died instead of you, my son, my son."

Commander Joab is disgusted that David doesn't care that many of the people loyal to him have been saved. He scolds David and asks why the lives of his officers mean nothing to him.

All David can think about is his son and how his commander Joab ignored his strict instruction to deal gently with Absalom.

That is an amazing story of forgiveness and grace. **Deal gently.** That is advice that brings healing to families. David's words remind us of the unconditional and extravagant love of God for each of us. **Deal gently.**

Even the most dysfunctional family situations can be turned around and have healing. God's love and compassion in us brings that healing to others. This requires spiritual strength and what gives us the strength is the acknowledgement that Jesus is the living bread.



A thousand years later, the apostle Paul give rules for the new life in Christ. In his letter to Christians in Ephesus, Paul writes that we are to build up each other with kind words. We are to *“be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you.”* (Ephesians 4:32)

“We are to be imitators of God as beloved children and live in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.” (Ephesians 5:1)

Deal gently. What a wonderful way to live. What an outrageous way to live.

What an extravagant way to live. **Amen.**

Archdeacon Deborah+

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tender-hearted,
forgiving each other,
just as God in Christ also
has forgiven you.”*
– Ephesians 4:32

