

The Connections of David: Mephibosheth

2 Samuel 9:1-13

Sunday, September 12, 2021, Aledo UMC

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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Old Testament Lesson, 2 Samuel 9:1-13

9:1 David asked, “Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?”

² Now there was a servant of Saul’s household named Ziba. They summoned him to appear before David, and the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?”

“At your service,” he replied.

³ The king asked, “Is there no one still alive from the house of Saul to whom I can show God’s kindness?”

Ziba answered the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan; he is lame in both feet.”

⁴ “Where is he?” the king asked.

Ziba answered, “He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar.”

⁵ So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel.

⁶ When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor.

David said, “Mephibosheth!”

“At your service,” he replied.

Sermon, “The Connections of David: Mephibosheth”

The word *grace* means many things to many people. This is certainly epitomized by Lofton Hudson’s clever book title, *Grace Is Not a Blue-eyed Blonde*. Hudson’s book was published way back in 1972; that probably explains its title. It seems rather dated. The book is out of print now, although Amazon had a line on eleven copies, all of which are available only through used bookstores.

I thought about using the title of that book as the title of today’s sermon; I even had Mike post it on the board outside. It certainly has more “zing” than a sermon with “Mephibosheth” in the title. But it smells rather sexist, and I certainly don’t want to offend the brunettes or redheads or especially the graceful greys in our service this morning.

What does it mean to have grace? We refer to a ballet dancer as having grace. We say grace at meals. We talk about Kate Middleton, the Duchess of Cambridge, as someone who brings a graceful style to the various events she attends. Grace can mean coordination of movement. It can mean a prayer. It can refer to dignity and elegance. However, the kind of grace I want to talk about this morning is unmerited favor. That is to say, grace is extending special favor to someone who doesn’t deserve it, who hasn’t earned it and who can never repay it.

We find that kind of grace in today’s Old Testament Lesson from 2 Samuel chapter 9. Outside of God’s grace, it may be the greatest illustration of grace in all the Old Testament. It

involves an obscure man with an almost unpronounceable name: **Mephibosheth**. And he is at the center of a beautiful, unforgettable story.

Before we meet Mephibosheth, however, we need to know something of the context for his remarkable story. David has become king of all Israel. It is a time of relative peace in his kingdom, a time which allowed David to reflect on his lot in life.

David was not born into royalty; he had started out as a forgotten shepherd tending to his father's sheep. He became a celebrated soldier after the defeat of Goliath. He began to frequent the courts of King Saul because his music was so soothing. He married the King's daughter and became best friends with the prince, Jonathan. Soon, however, King Saul grew jealous of David and spent years pursuing him in order to kill him.

Saul and Jonathan both recognized that one day David would become king of Israel.

In that day and age, it was the common custom of other Near Eastern dynasties that when a new king took over, all the family members of the previous dynasty were exterminated in order to take away the possibility of revolt.

Realizing that God had placed his hand on David and that he would one day become king, both Jonathan and Saul asked David at different times, "David, when you get to the throne, as surely as you will, will you show grace to my family? Will you not only spare the lives of my family that we may not be forgotten but will you also protect my family?"

Jonathan made his request back in 1 Samuel 20 and the Bible tells us that David sealed that promise with a sacred vow.

Four chapters later, David had the opportunity to kill Saul as the king relieved himself in a cave. Instead, David spared Saul's life and in response, Saul asked David to swear to him that he would not cut off his descendants once the kingdom of Israel was established in David's hand. Once again, David sealed that promise with a sacred vow, this time with Saul.

In 1 Samuel 31, both Saul and Jonathan were slain in battle against the Philistines and soon thereafter, David becomes king. After consolidating his power and finding success against the Philistines, we find him in a reflective mood in 2 Samuel 9:1—

Then David asked, "Is there anyone from Saul's family still alive that I may show him *grace* for Jonathan's sake?"

David is wondering if there is anyone from Saul's family who is still alive that he might show him grace. He doesn't ask, "Is there anyone who is qualified? Is there anyone who is worthy? Is there anyone who is handsome or gifted or fun to be around?"

Rather, David asks if there is anyone from Saul's family who is still alive that he might shower him or her with unmerited special favor even though he or she doesn't deserve it, hasn't earned it and can never repay it.

David finds his answer in verse 3: a former servant of Saul named Ziba, says, "There is a son of Jonathan who is crippled in both feet."

Why would Ziba add that qualifying statement? Why would Ziba be so quick to point out Mephibosheth's disability?

I suspect that Ziba is telegraphing to the king something like, "Your Majesty, you may want to think twice about Mephibosheth. He's not going to look good in out court. He's not going to

fit into the beautiful surroundings of your throne room because, David, he has a serious disability.”

But David doesn't think twice about it. He immediately responds, “Where is he?” He doesn't ask, “How badly is he crippled?” He doesn't even ask how he became crippled. All he wants to know is, “Where does the man live?”

But that's grace. Grace isn't picky. Grace doesn't care about what disfigured you—and face it, we've all been disfigured in one way or another by sin; the disfigurement of sin is just more obvious in some people's lives than others.

Grace doesn't ask if someone deserves favor because grace is for the undeserving.

Grace is given not because someone is beautiful or smart or gifted or fun to be around. Grace is given regardless of how you look, how you think, or what you offer. If grace were given for any other reason, then it wouldn't be grace.

Grace is one-sided. Grace gives and demands nothing in return. And grace is what we find in the story Mephibosheth.

How may we show grace like David? Is there a promise to show grace to another that we must yet fulfill? Perhaps we need to show that grace to a family member or a neighbor. Or maybe there's a child in Haiti that you meant to sponsor through Compassion International and you haven't done it as yet. Someone somewhere doesn't know it yet, but they need your grace. And they don't deserve it, but you need to show it.

So David asks, “Is there anyone from Saul's family still alive that I may show him grace for Jonathan's sake?”

Ziba replies, “There is still a son of Jonathan who is crippled in both feet.”

And David immediately responds, “Where is he?”

And Ziba says, “He is at the house of Ammiel's son Machir at Lo-debar.”

Lo-debar means nothing to us; we don't speak Hebrew. But Lo-debar says a lot about Mephibosheth's lot in life. In Hebrew *Lo* means “no” and *debar* is from the root word for pasture. So this descendant of both Saul and Jonathan is in a place of no pasture. He lives in a cruel, desolate place, some barren field in Palestine.

Now put yourself in Mephibosheth's sandals for a moment. Since the custom was to kill anyone from a previous dynasty, such persons were either exterminated or they went into hiding for the rest of their lives. And that's what Mephibosheth seems to have done: he hid himself away in what we would describe as the middle of nowhere. And the only one who knew of his existence was an old servant of Saul named Ziba.

David doesn't ask how Mephibosheth had become crippled in both feet, but we know because the reason is given in chapter 4:

Jonathan son of Saul had a son who was lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and became disabled. His name was Mephibosheth. (21 Samuel 4:4).

In other words, when she heard that Saul and Jonathan were dead, the nurse picked up the boy who was in her charge and fled in order to protect him. As she hurried, she likely tripped and the boy tumbled out of her arms and was permanently disabled. That means Mephibosheth's disability was tied to the death of his father and grandfather.

Now there comes to his door an emissary from the new regime and remember, new regimes killed the survivors of previous regimes. Can you imagine Mephibosheth's shock? Can you imagine his anxiety as David's soldiers say to him, "The king wants to see you." Mephibosheth probably thought, "Well, this is the end."

Mephibosheth is taken to Jerusalem, into the very presence of the king himself. Mephibosheth prostrates himself before David and in a trembling voice says, "Your Majesty, I am at your service." But David has other plans.

"Don't be afraid," David said to him, "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table."

⁸ Mephibosheth bowed down and said, "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?"

And that's when Mephibosheth is given a lesson in grace. "Mephibosheth, you don't deserve the king's grace. You did nothing to earn the king's grace. But the king is a man of his word and so that means you will receive the king's grace. You shall feast at my table; you shall become a member of my family. You shall receive a royal inheritance." So in verse 12 we read—

¹² Mephibosheth had a young son named Mika, and all the members of Ziba's household were servants of Mephibosheth. ¹³ And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table; he was lame in both feet.

Aren't we all like Mephibosheth? We don't deserve God's grace. We did nothing to earn God's grace. But God keeps his word, and he has promised to pour out his grace, his favor and his mercy on us—despite the fact that we have been disfigured by sin; despite the fact that we have been crippled by the wages of sin. We are invited into the presence of the King. We feast at his table. We become a member of God's family. And we receive a royal inheritance. Praise the Lord!