

The Seventh Sunday after Epiphany
February 23, 2014
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

1 Samuel 26:7-25

So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him. Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice." But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the LORD lives," he said, "the LORD himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go." So David took the spear and water jug near Saul's head, and they left. No one saw or knew about it, nor did anyone wake up. They were all sleeping, because the LORD had put them into a deep sleep. Then David crossed over to the other side and stood on top of the hill some distance away; there was a wide space between them. He called out to the army and to Abner son of Ner, "Aren't you going to answer me, Abner?" Abner replied, "Who are you who calls to the king?" David said, "You're a man, aren't you? And who is like you in Israel? Why didn't you guard your lord the king? Someone came to destroy your lord the king. What you have done is not good. As surely as the LORD lives, you and your men deserve to die, because you did not guard your master, the LORD's anointed. Look around you. Where are the king's spear and water jug that were near his head?" Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is that your voice, David my son?" David replied, "Yes it is, my lord the king." And he added, "Why is my lord pursuing his servant? What have I done, and what wrong am I guilty of? Now let my lord the king listen to his servant's words. If the LORD has incited you against me, then may he accept an offering. If, however, men have done it, may they be cursed before the LORD! They have now driven me from my share in the LORD's inheritance and have said, 'Go, serve other gods.' Now do not let my blood fall to the ground far from the presence of the LORD. The king of Israel has come out to look for a flea--as one hunts a partridge in the mountains." Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly." "Here is the king's spear," David answered. "Let one of your young men come over and get it. The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness. The LORD delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the LORD's anointed. As surely as I valued your life today, so may the LORD value my life and deliver me from all trouble." Then Saul said to David, "May you be blessed, my son David; you will do great things and surely triumph." So David went on his way, and Saul returned home. (NIV)

I live with three children. Any of you who do the same understand what this means at times. You hear arguing. You hear one kid start something and another react and soon

there is a full out fight. To be honest I really can't complain too much. My kids are not perfect, but they actually do pretty well in getting along and showing love for each other the majority of the time.

However, now I come to the reason I ask for your sympathy this morning. I also live with three cats. These cats do not do so well the majority of the time in getting along. If you know cats they can be very territorial. One cat hisses and the other hisses right back. One cat comes into a room and the other two chase it out. One cat bites and the other attacks. Then the third jumps in and the claws come out and the next thing you know cat hair is flying around the room. I have never known or seen a cat turn the other cheek when it comes to a cat fight. Instead, the claws always seem to come out.

Isn't this very much like human nature – to defend your turf – to do whatever it takes to survive in a dog eat dog (or cat claw cat) world? Someone snaps at us and we snap back. Someone hurts us - we hope they get what they have coming to them. Someone mistreats us - so we feel it is our right to mistreat them. Someone hates us - while you get the point. This is until Jesus comes to us and says: ***“but I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”*** (Matthew 5). As we turn to Jesus who showed perfect love even for his enemies, as we look this morning at this loving example of David, I pray we are led by the Spirit to also love even those who persecute us. Today, it is my prayer God's Word teaches us to:

Bring out the cross not the claws!

Saul was the very first king of Israel and God had made it clear David was His choice to be the second. If you read the Bible history up to this point you will find a common refrain in the previous chapters. David was good to Saul. Saul was not so good to David. David stepped up when Saul's army was threatened by a giant named Goliath. David won many battles for Saul and defended the kingdom well. In return, Saul started to keep a jealous eye on David. David played the harp for Saul to sooth him from an evil spirit tormenting him. Saul repaid him by trying to kill David by twice throwing a spear at him. Then there was a third time Saul took his spear and tried pinning David against the wall. David became very good friends with Saul's son Jonathan. Saul responded by wanting to kill David all the more because he didn't want David to be the next king. David fled and Saul tried to hunt David down and take his life.

One day Saul went into a dark cave in which David was hiding. Unaware that David and his men were hiding in there David had an opportunity to take Saul's life. Instead, David cut off the corner of Saul's robe. When Saul came out David called out to him and showed him the piece of robe. David spared Saul's life and had never meant any harm to him. David said he would not lift his hand against the king, the Lord's anointed. David added: ***“May the Lord be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand.”*** Saul wept, acknowledged David will be king of Israel, and returned home.

But history has a way of repeating itself and so does sin. After some time Saul gets word that David is hiding in the hills of Hikilah so Saul is on the hunt again. Saul takes 3000 of his finest soldiers and sets up camp with a plan to find David and kill him. This is where our text tells us what happens next. David comes to the place where Saul and his men were camping. They were sleeping. Then David asks someone to go with him into the camp. Abishai, David's nephew and also the brother of Joab, David's commander, offers to go along. They walk right through the camp of men until they get to Saul and the commander of the army of Israel, Abner. No one woke up because they were in a deep sleep which we are told was because of the Lord. So here was David's opportunity to take out his enemy and be done with it. ***“Abishai said to***

David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice."

Don't you kind of agree with Abishai? It was time to let the claws come out! Abishai promises not to miss his mark and then David will not have to run and hide anymore. Would anyone have faulted David for killing Saul? Saul had unfairly abused him; Saul had unfairly exiled him; Saul had unfairly tried to kill him. David could have claimed his actions were in self-defense or in fighting a just war or in taking the office to which he had been anointed. Who would have found fault with him? Certainly, not Abishai or Joab! Though unfailingly brave, they could never understand David's lack of pragmatic action.

Yet, David shows once again why he was a man after God's own heart. **"But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the LORD lives," he said, "the LORD himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go."** Now we see what is behind David's thinking. David trusted that his reward was with his God, and so he had no need for vengeance. He put the matter in the hands of the Lord. He was able to forgive because David had been forgiven and would need God's forgiveness all his life. He was able to show compassion because the Lord showered him with compassion. He respected the Lord anointed for that is who He would be very soon. His trust in the Lord and the Lord's love for David freed him to be able to love even his enemy Saul.

So after David grabbed Saul's spear and water jug he went on top of a hill some distance away and called out to the army of Abner. He asked this commander why he didn't take better care of the king as he asked where Saul's spear and water jug were. Then Saul recognized David's voice. David once again showed mercy in sparing Saul's life and his reputation grew as a man of character. David asks Saul if his motives come from God or from men. David again asks what he had done wrong and why Saul was pursuing him and has come out **"to look for a flea--as one hunts a partridge in the mountains."** After Saul admitted he had sinned and acted a fool, he invited David to come back and promised to not to harm David again. David wisely did not trust Saul, and had Saul sent one of his young men to get back his spear and water jug. **"Then Saul said to David, "May you be blessed, my son David; you will do great things and surely triumph." So David went on his way, and Saul returned home."** As far as we know from the Bible this is the last time Saul and David ever spoke.

So, dear friends, what is there for us to learn in all of this? I think we all recognize this is not an easy example to follow. It is very difficult to be polite to someone who is rude to us, to be kind to someone who is mean to us, and to show mercy to a person who is cruel to us. How can we possibly love someone who hates us? It is no wonder after Jesus tells us to love our enemies He commands: **"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."** This is what it would take to always obey such a command as loving your enemies. Yet, there is one who always did.

Thank God Jesus did or you and I would be lost forever. For as the apostle Paul writes: **"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us...when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son."** (Romans 4) It isn't just those that stood there taunting Jesus and mocking him and spitting in his face and hitting him, who were Jesus' enemies. Our sins made us enemies. We are guilty of laying our hands on the Lord's anointed! Our sins caused Jesus to suffer and die. As the nails were hammered through his hands after the nail was pounded through His feet, it was for us Jesus

also prayed: ***“Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”*** Now that is what true love for enemies looks like. Jesus didn’t just spare the lives of His enemies – He gave His life up for them - to save them – to save us. Our Savior went into the grave and back out again to bring us peace with a holy God. His saving love has made friends out of former foes, it has turned persecutors into preachers, and has changed enemies into children of God.

Now it is this Savior who turns to you and me today and says: ***“but I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”*** For Jesus wants His saving love to shine in our lives. He wants us who have been forgiven to be forgiving. He wants us who have been shown mercy to be merciful. He wants us who have witnessed unfailing love to follow Him in loving the unlovable. It is truly part of our sinful human nature to have the claws come out when someone hurts or mistreats us. Tonight, instead of your normal prayer routine take to the Lord in prayer the names of those who have given you the most trouble and ask for the Lord’s blessings on them. It is a difficult thing to do. But Jesus’ cross makes it possible. What a blessing it truly is for others and for us when we learn this truth – that it is always better to bring out the cross, not the claws! Amen.