

Sermon: August 9, 2009

Scripture: II Samuel 18:5-9, 15,31-33; Ephesians 4:25-5:2;

Title: "Absalom: How Not to Do It!"

Call to Worship: Psalm 130

Leader: Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord;

People: Lord hear my voice!

Leader: Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

People: Lord hear my voice!

Leader: If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, who would stand?

People: Lord hear my voice!

Leader: But there is "forgiveness" with You, that You may be feared.

People: I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,

And in His word I do hope.

My soul waits for the Lord

More than those who watch for the morning –

I say, more than those who watch for the morning.

Leader: O "People of God", hope in the Lord;

For with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him

Is abundant redemption

People: And God shall redeem "The People of God"

From all their iniquities. Amen.

Hymns: #207 How Lovely, Lord

#376 Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

#433 There's A Spirit in the Air

Prayer of Confession:

Eternal God, from who comes every good and perfect gift, we pause to confess our sinfulness before Your throne. Too often we are like Absalom, who not only wanted the throne of his father David, but fomented rebellion to overthrow him. We grow impatient for the gifts which you hold for us and we attempt to appropriate them for ourselves. We trample others to get what we want. We take more than we really need. We are insensitive to those who are in no position to struggle with life. And we often feel that abundance is our right. Forgive us, O Lord, for our self serving behavior and make us more aware of the needs of all Your people. We pray in the name of Christ whose life is a model for our own. Amen

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Title: "Absalom: How Not To Do It!"

Most of us don't know much about Absalom. He's one of those secondary characters from the pages of scripture. He didn't found a nation. He didn't preach a great sermon. He did not have a great vision and become a Prophet like Isaiah. Indeed, Absalom probably wouldn't be remembered at all if he had not done everything in life wrong. That's right... wrong! And in the end, he caused his father much grief, pain and tears.

So who was this Absalom? And why is he such a good example of how not to do life? Let's begin at the beginning. Historians tell us that Absalom was born in Hebron and his mother's name was Maacah the daughter of the King of Geshur in Aram.

David was a man of many wives. Whenever he felt threatened by a neighboring tribe or political entity, David would make a covenant with them, a mutual protection treaty and to seal the treaty David would take as one of his wives a daughter of the King of that nation/tribe/clan, or whatever you called it. I think you can see where this is going. We already know how David arranged to have Bathsheba's husband placed in the front row of the army when it went into battle so he could claim her for his wife. It is no wonder then that the historians tell us that David not only had more than eight wives, but many more concubines. It only follows then that David had numerous sons (sorry ladies, we have very little record of the daughters born to David). Six sons were born at Hebron among them Absalom and 13 sons born in Jerusalem, among them Solomon.

Thus the stage is set for a great amount of political infighting among the brothers. Who will become the next king after David? The intrigue is intoxicating. Both the old testament books of II Samuel and I Chronicles tell the stories of infighting, back stabbing and murder

between the brothers. Absalom at one point takes revenge on his older brother, killing him for his violation of his sister. He flees from David's court and lives with his grandmother for three years before he can get back in the good graces of his father. Finally, David allows his son Absalom to return to court where he slowly to assert his claim to be the legal heir of David. Now, remember that David is in the hayday of his reign. He is not sick or dying. And his son, Absalom establishes a challenge to his power as King. The records indicate that Absalom established a program of "studied subversion, in which Absalom undermined the people's confidence in David by exaggerating the evils of the kings court." (Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, pg. 22)

Absalom was able to gain the allegiance of several army officers and laid out plans to execute a coup against his father. Even when King David heard about the plan, he instructed his servants and military officers that Absalom was not to be hurt. However, as fate would have it, after the battle, when Absalom's forces were defeated and Absalom was fleeing the field of battle, his mule went through a forest where Absalom was caught by his hair in the tree limbs and he was left swinging in the breeze by his hair. His mule had continued on his way. When the pursuing army of David caught up with Absalom swinging in the trees, they executed him.

Thus we have one of the most famous laments in all of scripture.
"O my son Absalom – my son, my son Absalom – if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!"

Yes, I believe we can safely say that Absalom did just about everything wrong. Born to a place of privilage, he abused his position, even plotting against his father. Given every opportunity to redeem himself, he plotted instead to seize power and to destroy the very one who gave him life. There just isn't much good we can say about Absalom. But his father loved him. His father cried tears of anguish over his dead body. His Father even bemoaned the fact that Absalom died and he would

rather it had been himself. Truly one of the pivotal moments in the life of David.

So, what do we learn? Don't plot against your father? Don't be so greedy? Don't lose your moral compass? We are not sure that Absalom ever had a moral compass.

We have to turn to the New Testament to find the antithesis of Absalom. You can find it in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. You can find it in the faithfulness of John as he penned his Revelation from the Island of Pathmos. We can find it in the love and tenderness of Mary and Martha as they ministered to Jesus. And we can find it in the life and writings of Paul of Tarsus. Listen to these words:

Therefore, putting away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you. Therefore be followers of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. Ephesians 4:25-5:2

My friends in Christ, God never intended for us to live the life of Absalom. Because, when you really examine his life, it wasn't real living at all. It was a kind of existence that tumbles from one catastrophe to another. It was an ill spent life of conniving and attempting to get over on everybody with whom he came into contact.

Where was the joy and peace in his life? It wasn't there was it. Where was the sense of accomplishment and fellowship with neighbors and friends? It wasn't there was it.

You and I know folks today who are doing it all wrong. And we cringe when we watch them make a shambles of their lives. We see them focus on their own needs, their own pleasure, their own satisfaction, their own position in the community. Indeed, some folks we know are all about themselves. We have a phrase we use from time to time to describe a member of our family. We say she's a AAS. All about Sue. (I changed the name. No Sues in my family.)

But what can you do? Well, you know something. Even King David couldn't help his son Absalom. I'm sure he read the riot act to him when he allowed him to come back to court after three years of living with his grandmother. But it did not seem to make a difference. Absalom cooked up a plot to destroy his father, even in the face of the fact that David loved his son.

The truth is that you and I have to get on with our lives. Model our behavior in the manner that Paul outlines for us. There is no way under God's creation that I can change someone else. I have a hard enough time with myself. You and I have to focus on ourselves as instruments of God's Grace. You and I have to become the image of Christ as Paul lays it out for us. And if we can become somewhat successful in that endeavor, then perhaps... just perhaps... those AAS people will begin to get the message. Those All About Self people will begin to understand that life is far more richer when it is lived for others, when it is lived pointed outward rather than inward. Inward is self destructive. Just ask Absalom hanging there by his hair caught in the Oak trees. Outward is freeing, Outward is life giving, not life sucking. Outward is other oriented. And that is exactly where Christ is leading us throughout the Gospel.

When you and I committed ourselves to Jesus Christ, one of the things that we committed ourselves to was a life of giving and sharing. Our time, our talents, our caring, our material wealth. There is not a single part of our existence that we can claim as being exclusively ours. It all belongs to God. From our bodies to our voices; from our time to our talents; from our wealth to our will power. The Psalmist sings that we are God's. From birth to death. You see, that is what Absalom did not understand.

So now, the struggle for you and me is to maintain our focus on Christ and The Cross. Let me go back to that passage from Paul. Remember that line that talks about not stealing?

Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

We might say, that the Ten Commandments tell us not to steal. That ought to be enough, right. Just don't do it! But look at Paul's insight into stealing. Don't steal, rather work with your hands and earn a living and take care of your own needs.... So that in the end you will have something to give to the less fortunate on this world. Absalom would never grasp that line of thinking. Only someone who has their eyes focused on the Grace of God in Christ would understand what that is all about. It's not about you. It's about others.

And how about those words which instruct us not to use gutteral language?

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

Again we know not to cuss and swear and certainly not to bear false witness against our neighbors and to refrain from lying. We know these things. But the Gospel takes us a step further. When you open your

mouth, let the words that come out be words that build people up and edify them. If you have something to say, make sure that it is uplifting and that those who hear it will gain something of the grace of God from those words. Absalom was too busy lying to the generals and plotting to do his father in to think about the fact that his words were drawing others into his plot and eventually to their deaths.

Have you ever known someone who talks one way when he is with a certain group, but when he is off with others he talks differently. You cannot be two-faced. If your life is filled with bitterness it is mighty hard to be kind to others. If you are consumed with wrath, it is extremely to reach out and touch others who are hurting. If you spew evil about others, how can you turn around on Sunday and sing hymns of love and joy?

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.

Forgiveness is so difficult for those who still harbor hate. We cannot be two-faced in our Faith, pouring out vindictive toward those we despise and then asking God to forgive us our debts as we forgive others theirs. God knows the condition of our hearts. And that is something that Absalom completely missed. We have no other model for forgiveness than that which is demonstrated on the cross when Christ looked down upon his executioners and said: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Ultimately we end up exactly where Paul ended up when he wrote to the Ephesian Christians:

Therefore be followers of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

You see, ultimately you and I have to make a decision. Are we going to walk in love, or are we going to be just another Absalom.

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