

Sunday April 18th, 2021

1 Samuel 20:28-42

Series: People We All Need in our Lives

Sermon: "We all Need a Jonathan"

I am not so sure it holds the same sway as it did when I was younger, but as a child we were always admonished to be careful about the company we kept. It was also expressed as, being careful about the crowd you ran with. Sid Guillen says that his mother had an interesting way of describing the importance of keeping good company. She used to say, "You don't work in the garden with white gloves. The gloves will become dirty, the dirt will not become glovey." (1001 Humorous Illustrations p. 157)

Another Funny way of expressing this is that if you allow a pig into the parlor, it won't change the pig, but it will sure change the parlor. Again, as we are going through this series, I reiterate that these relationships are a gift from God, a demonstration of his grace. These vital relationships help us to experience the abundant life Jesus promised.

Today in our series, borrowing again from Leonard Sweet's book, *11 Indispensable Relationships*, we stop a second time to examine a critical relationship in King David's life. Despite the ugly incident we looked at last week, in regards to David's manipulating event that led to Uriah's death, and taking his wife Bathsheba, David's legacy has survived as one of the true giants of scripture.

Bono of U2 fame named David as the "Elvis of the bible", and went on to talk about David's songs, or Psalms, as influencing his own song writing. Joseph Heller in his book called *God Knows* which is about David's life, has David saying the following about himself,

"I don't like to boast...but I honestly think I have the best story in the bible...Old Sarah's fun... Abraham, of course, is ever up to the mark...Joseph is pretty lively as the pampered, late born, bratty favorite of his doting father...Moses isn't bad, I have to admit, but he's very, very long... Moses has the ten commandments, it's true, but I have better lines, I've got the poetry and the passion, savage violence and the plain raw civilizing grief of human heartbreak"

I think we can all agree that David was, despite his flaws, very special, but I think that a great deal of his success, and special status, is due to one thing that can make anyone of us special. David had a Jonathan. The bible says that Jonathan, the son and heir to King Saul, loved David as himself. In life, as we all know, there are differing levels of friendship based on intensity and intimacy. Cicero said that a "true friend is, so to speak, a second self."

I think it is safe to say that all of us long for such friendship, but one wonders how many of us truly experience it. A friend, like Jonathan was to David, is clearly described in the scriptures if you want to examine their relationship in detail. Johnathan was to David, loyal, even when circumstances made it difficult, even dangerous to be loyal. Jonathan was the first person to turn up at David's side in good times and in bad.

Johnathan gave and gave to David with no request for repayment. Johnathan stood by David through the most awful of life's experiences.

Sunday April 18th, 2021

When King Saul, Jonathan's father, threatened David's life, Jonathan stood with David. When David's life was as dark as it could be, Jonathan stood with him. David's life does point at an observation. I don't know if you have noticed something about artistic people. Many of them seem prone to melancholy. As successful as they are, they never seem to be able to break the darkness that surrounds them.

We've all heard the stories of actors, artists, musicians, who seem bent on self-destruction. Why this is, is a discussion for another day, but David seems also afflicted by this. Just read some of his Psalms, and you can feel the melancholy dripping from his words. A Jonathan stands by his melancholy friend, and pulls them out of the miry pit of despair. A Jonathan comes and defends your life's meaning when you believe your life has no meaning.

But most surprising of all, and most incredible of all, is that a Jonathan sacrifices themselves, knowing that the more your star rises, the more their own diminishes. A Jonathan is willing to lead a life of decreasing significance, or as John the Baptist said about his cousin Jesus, "He must become greater, I must become less." Jesus said it more clearly, "Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends." And then he states, "You are my friends".

Throughout our literary history we see again and again this relationship described. In the Harry Potter stories, Harry had his Jonathan in Ron Weasley. Remember the game of giant chess in the first story and film? Do we have a Jonathan who is willing to take a bullet for us? A friend who is truly willing to lay down their lives for us. Yet, we must be cautious here in understanding that what we are describing is not necessarily our best friend, but rather our true friend.

A Jonathan is more than a mere acquaintance or companion. Proverbs warns us about confusing the two. "One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." (Prov. 18:24) So, who is that one who stands closer to you than a brother or sister? Who is the second self who stands with you though the tempest rage in your life? In the apocryphal book Ecclesiasticus (6:14) we read, "Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter: whoever finds one has found a treasure...Faithful friends are life-saving medicine."

Like many of you, Laura and I have on occasion jumped on the Blue Jay's bandwagon, and therefore baseball stories seem to resonate with me. Leonard Sweet quotes the baseball great Ty Cobb, who in 1961, near the end of his life, confessed, "If I had a chance to live my life over, I'd do things different...I'd have more friends." Sure, Ty Cobbs had acquaintances, hangers-on, but Ty Cobb was lamenting that he did not have a Jonathan.

The great Roman orator Cicero wrote an essay called "On True Friendship". In this essay he wrote that if when we die, we can count on the fingers of one hand the number of true friends we have, we would be the wealthiest person on the planet. True friends, people like Jonathan, are rare. Montaigne thought Cicero an optimist. He claimed that there was likely only one such person for each of us.

Are true friends like Jonathan rare? You know they are. We wonder that if we started counting them on our fingers could we hold up even one. So, why are these relationships so rare? What hampers their development? The first reason is what Sweet calls "ego land".

Sunday April 18th, 2021

And no this is not like “LEGOLAND”. It all has to do with the fact that all of us have a default setting in our relationship where the first question we ask is “What’s in it for me?” Have you heard of this thing that’s all the rage right now called “networking”? Through social media like Facebook and LinkedIn and others, people are encouraged to make connections, not for true friendship, but rather for what they can do for you.

Networking is about cultivating relationships that are to our own advantage or at least basking in the attention of others. The art of true friendship is a dying one I am afraid. A Jonathan doesn’t ask “what’s in it for me” but rather, “What’s in it for you”? Only when our ego is checked at the door and we are not weighed down by: self-absorption, pride, ambition, and undisciplined selfish impulses, can we truly become a Jonathan.

True friendship can be fragile when the poison of egotism seeps in. Gore Vidal said once, that every time a friend succeeded, he died a little. That’s egotism. John Singer Sargent the famous painter said that every time he painted a portrait, he lost a friend. “What’s in it for me” is a sure-fire way to end a true friendship. The other thing that can kill a true friendship, I think, effects men more than women, at least that is what columnist Laura Marcus suggests.

Marcus writes that a man’s typical idea of a best friend is someone they haven’t seen in ten years. There is a psychological reason for this that Dan Montgomery writes about in his book “The Beauty in Stone.” Montgomery writes that relationships are like being on an elevator. For a relationship to truly deepen, the elevator must go down into ever deeper levels of trust and truth. On the first level we relate as facades, or public appearances.

Conversations are nothing more than small talk, about sports, the weather, or politics. This is the opening stage for getting to know someone. On the acquaintance level we start to reveal some of our more private ideas and sentiments. Here we present our viewpoints on politics, religion, social issues, etc. We are risking that people may take offence but we are still not very vulnerable.

The next level is the friendship level, and to reach it we must experience emotional vulnerability. We share our feelings but still hold back on our deepest feelings. We look at this level for compatibility, mutual trust and empathy. If all goes well, and usually this take considerable time to achieve, we can take the elevator down one more level which is the intimacy level. This is where we come clean to another person.

This is where our dark side, our wounds, those things that make us feel shame are revealed. Here we share our deepest desires and fears. Many people never achieve this level, not even in their marriages, and sometimes a therapist is needed to help them get to this level. Psychologist tell us that the true test of your psychological health is based on whether or not you have at least one person in your life at this level.

The lack of such relationships is also one of the reasons that many people seek out therapists, or psychiatrist or other trained counsellors. They know that confidentiality is a professional standard and therefore in their sessions they can bare their souls. The same goes for a confessional or session with a minister.

Sunday April 18th, 2021

The deepest level is a very difficult level for all of us to achieve, and I agree that for men it is doubly so. Finally, Jonathans are rare because a Jonathan is willing to pay the price of being that true friend. Perhaps the highest price in all this is simply time. True friends spend hefty amounts of time together. So, in a culture where time is money, true friendship is costly, sacrificial even. Sacrifice is an unwelcome word in today's modern world.

A Jonathan recognizes that true friendship has two components, which are unfashionable: duty and sacrifice. Freud famously asked once, "What does a woman want?" Daniel Goleman famously answered, "Simple. She wants a partner who cares what she wants." Maybe one of the reasons these relationships are so rare is that they terrify us. This is certainly the case for men. In September of 2014, Christianity Today publish a revealing article entitled "Why Can't Men Be Friends?"

Author Wesley Hill suggests that the deeper a relationship goes, the larger issues like suspicion, and unsettledness and doubt grow. Deep relationships-especially among members of the same sex, can be very problematic for most people, especially men. As young boys, men have no difficulty forming deep friendships, but as they grow older, men fear that it may be construed by others that there is a sexual element to their friendship.

Afraid of crossing boundaries of propriety, many Christians, both single and married, never develop meaningful relationships with the opposite sex. Research also shows it's not just men who suffer. Young mothers report how lonely they are, that while attending to their children, their friendships suffer. And as we approach middle age we tend to gravitate and isolate ourselves into the few relationships we already have, like family.

In other words, we would rather spend time with our kids than go to a party. Friendship is unique as a relationship. In C.S. Lewis' book *The Four Loves*, Lewis makes a great effort to distinguish friendship from erotic attachment. He points out that lovers meet face to face but friends stand side by side. The nature of true friendship is thus described by Lewis, "I have no duty to be anyone's friend, and no man in the world has a duty to be mine." It's voluntary.

Friendship isn't really for anything such as procreation or productivity. It simply is, by choice of the people involved. Wesley Hill says that what he truly needs is "people who know what time my plane lands, who will worry when I don't show up when I say I will. I need to know that, come hell or high water, a few people will stay with me, loving me in spite of my faults and caring for me when I am down." Frankly, it is what we all need.

I came across a story out of the annals of World War I, about sacrificial friendship. It involved two friends who were inseparable. They had enlisted together, trained together, were shipped overseas together, and fought side-by-side in the trenches. During an attack, one of the men was critically wounded in a field filled with barbed wire obstacles, and he was unable to crawl back to his foxhole.

The entire area was under a withering enemy crossfire, and it was suicidal to try and reach him. Yet his friend decided to try. Before he could get out of his own trench, his sergeant yanked him back inside and ordered him not to go. "It's too late.

Sunday April 18th, 2021

You can't do him any good, and you'll only get yourself killed." A few minutes later, the officer turned his back, and instantly the man was gone after his friend. Minutes passed until the man staggered back, mortally wounded with his friend, now dead in his arms. The sergeant was both angry and deeply moved. "What a waste," he blurted out. "He's dead and you're dying. It just wasn't worth it." With his almost last breath, the dying man replied, "Oh, yes, it was, Sarge. When I got to him, the only thing he said was, 'I knew you'd come, Jim!'" (Tales of a Tardy Oxcart, p.222)

David had that kind of confidence in Jonathan. No matter what, Jonathan would come. Do you have a friend like that in your life? Are you that kind of friend to someone else? Are you, God's gift of grace to someone?

I am not much a poetry lover but I found a short verse that truly spoke to me on this subject and these are words I want to leave you with today. From the pen of Dinah Maria Mulock Craik come this verse.

Oh, the comfort-the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person,
Having neither to weigh thoughts,
Nor measure words-but pouring them
All right out-just as they are-
Chaff and grain together-
Certain that a faithful hand will
Take them and sift them-
Keeping what is worth keeping-
And with a breath of kindness
Blow the rest away.

(Handbook of Preaching Resources from Literature)

Do you have a Jonathan in your life and are you a Jonathan to someone else? If you want to experience abundant living then you need both.