

August 5, 2018

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 7 Year B

1 Samuel 17:1a, 4-11, 19-23, 32-49; Psalm 9: 9-20; Mark 4:35-41

“We all need a Abigail and Nathan!”

In the name of God who creates life,

In the name of the Savior who loves life,

In the name of the Spirit who is the fire of life.

Amen

As some of you know Kate and I have two dogs. There's Carter, a coon hound mix. He's lanky and tall, kind of like a beagle on stilts but built like a greyhound. The other is Tater. He's a Feist, a type of terrier. He's short, in fact about half of Carter's height, and rather scrappy. The two of them get along like brothers and enjoy wrestling. It's easy for Carter, being the tallest, to get the better of Tater when they wrestle. Tater, though, has developed a strategy to deal with Carter. They face off, teeth bared, but still playful, the bell rings and away they go. Tater runs underneath Carter from front to back...before Carter realizes what has happened Tater has turned around and bites on Carter's leg.

You laugh...but that goes to show...we all love a good underdog story.

About a month ago, in the lectionary, we heard of the epic battle of David, the classic underdog, against Goliath the Philistine. It could be argued that this story is what sets David apart for us. He likely would just be another part of Israel's history without being first painted as an underdog and unlikely king.

It's worth going back to the scene of this epic battle, for just a moment. The Israelites and the Philistines had been facing off over this valley for quite some time. There were likely some skirmishes, but the writer of the text points out the most unusual occurrence in this battle, twice a day the Philistine army has Goliath come out and taunt Saul and his army; Goliath, this massive warrior, standing somewhere between seven and ten feet tall. His armor and weaponry so heavy he needs an assistant to help carry it.

Can you imagine someone matching this description standing just outside the church daring us to come out and face them? We'd all be frozen in our tracks.

And then if the story isn't odd enough, in comes David. He had a job to do, and it wasn't to go out and fight Goliath...yet. He was a shepherd and was moonlighting as armor bearer for Saul. He had a flock to tend to, and then would run supplies to the troops. We do know at this point though that David has stood out, but has not yet been set apart by his actions. But in this moment, in this battle, David is the shepherd boy that is far from being a soldier of the line, let alone king.

As they are frozen there, facing this giant's taunts and threats, David comes forward makes the bold claim "I can do it" "I can rid you of this meddlesome Philistine"

The only thing that rang out louder than the taunts of Goliath in the valley that day was the laughter as David stumbled about in the armor, helmet and sword. But to do battle with the giant, David could not be untrue to who he was or how he was called by God. He shed the armor and helmet, dropped the sword and marched off with a sling and five smooth stones.

We know how the battle ended. David slays the giant and now he finds himself as the unique hero of the Israelites, he is now set apart.

We love a good underdog story. We admire the underdog, we root for them, we see in them examples of how we want to be. In David we see... the servant, one who is close to God, has an almost intimate knowledge of the ways of God, and the courage to face danger with only what God has given him.

Since we read of the battle with Goliath a lot has happened for David. He has a falling out with Saul, finds himself on the run – at one point even fleeing to serve the Philistine king Achish - and becomes the king of Judah after the death of Saul and of all Israel at the death of Ishbaal.

We also hear of David's struggle to be true to God and remain righteous. It is in the pre-kingship time when David experiences his first God intervention through Abigail. Abigail's husband,

Nabal, dealt unfairly with David. David planned on striking him down, but Abigail intervened and pointed out that David's action would, like Nabal's be folly and sin. And she reminds David of God's promise to him and his dynasty.¹ David heeded Abigail's words. **She was able to keep David from falling into sin and stay true to his call.**

We read of the second God intervention for David in today's reading.

David's kingship had the markings of a soap opera – a quest for power, pride, disobedience to God, treachery, adultery and murder. In a way, David had become Goliath, the one not in favor with God. And this is what gets pointed out by Nathan in today's reading. **Nathan calls David out on his sins, and reminds David that iniquity does not go unpunished.**

Abigail and Nathan are each fascinating characters in David's story. As David gains more for the kingdom, wages wars, faces the temptation of power, and struggles to remain faithful to God, they stand as beacons of righteousness for David and Israel. And they are reminders to us that to follow God's call is not an easy one, nor can it be done alone.

We need Abigail; we need Nathan, in our lives because we too... are David. We too risk becoming Goliath, out of favor with God. We need others that can remind us of our call, the promises of God, and the source of our blessings.

¹ "Oremus Bible Browser : 1 Samuel 25," accessed August 4, 2018, <http://bible.oremus.org/>.

When we start out as a spiritual underdog we found ourselves awed by the fact that the God that made the universe, made us and loves us beyond measure. Not only does God love us but calls us to be builders of God's kingdom. Our faith is as strong as the shepherd David at this point. Life and the world begin to work on us though, and we find ourselves faced with ugly realities that seem more present than God. Without even giving it a thought, we find ourselves acting as though we are God. This is when we need our Abigail, the one that brings us back to the right course. Who is your Abigail? The one that will not let you leave the path God has set for you.

In Nathan's oracle God declares many things to David – God's role in raising him up, keeping him safe from enemies, promises to Israel and the people's future.² And David's prayer is a response to these things, but his prayer omits a response to something very important. The oracle includes "When he commits iniquity, I will punish him...But I will not take my steadfast love from him" It is an understanding that **there will be times** when David...when we...fall away from God. There are consequences, and this is what Nathan pointed out to David, but the loss of God's love is not one of those consequences. Who is your Nathan? The one who is there to catch you when you fall and see you back to God.

² "Oremus Bible Browser : 2 Samuel 7:13-17," accessed August 4, 2018, <http://bible.oremus.org/>.

We will, in our Goliath moments, come close to wondering off course. We will have times where we fall away from God. We need our Abigail; we need our Nathan to walk our journey with us.

Not only do we each need our own Abigail and Nathan, we need to be Abigail and Nathan for others. Our command to love God and love neighbor compels us to join others on their journey, in their calling, in their brokenness and respond with the same love we desire when faced with the struggles of our journey, the doubt in our call, and our moments of brokenness. We may not be called to be a prophet or deliver messages to kings, but we are called to be together, serving God, bringing love and compassion to those who hurt.

And we shouldn't lose sight that Abigail and Nathan both responded to very specific events in David's life. They did not lambast him over many things – their voice to David was a word in his ear, not a shout into the wind.

Abigail and Nathan also teach us that good news is not necessarily something we always want to hear. Good news often finds us in the times when where we're at, or what we're doing, is not right. Good news finds us when our hunger for God and thirst for the Spirit is strongest, whether we know it or not. It hits us when we're chasing after the things not of God.

Jesus cautions us of this in today's Gospel reading. Those that he fed wanted more; not more of God, but more food and more

signs. They did not have God in sight, but expected blessings none the less.

When we face our hunger for God, our thirst for God's spirit; when our tank is empty, and we have strayed from the shepherd to Goliath we need to be open to the acts of God. We need our Abigail, we need our Nathan, and we need to be fed by the bread of life.

Have faith, your Abigail is there and you are blessed to be Abigail to others, keeping them on God's course. Your Nathan is there, and you are blessed to be the voice that says "in your brokenness God's love is still there".

Fed by the bread of life through Christ the grace and blessings of God are here.