

## *David, the political strategist and mastermind*

*2 Samuel 5:1-6; 7:11-17*

So, for the past two weeks we have been moving our way through 1 Samuel and today we have moved into 2 Samuel. These two books cover about 100 years from the close of the time of Judges to the establishment of the kingdom of David. Now I am reading these books the following storyline we follow the storyline of Samuel, Saul and David and as I was rereading it again last night I felt like I was transported into a season of Game of Thrones with 12 tribes of Israel trying to be united and to unite the realm with huge challenges faced. The players in the Game of Thrones of Israel were Samuel, a faithful prophet, Saul, the tragic, disobedient king who as Leigh reminded us was not trained for his position and was the first King and thus there was no template to follow who also relied on his own judgment instead of listening to God. And then there was David, the man, the myth, the legend. The one whom God promised the kingdom to; the beloved.

We first encounter David through Samuel. God told Samuel to go and anoint a new king. So, Samuel heads into Bethlehem to the family of Jesse who has all these sons and Samuel is told to pick one of Jesse's many sons. And Samuel begins by rejecting, arguably, the good looking tall one, the oldest of the bunch, looked at a few others, wasn't sure and then out of the sheep field comes David; a shepherd and that's the one that Samuel chooses. Then, during Saul's reign, David appears for a second time. It turns out he is a man of many skills; he's a great musician and, in fact, he is invited to play for King Saul and he soothes Saul's aches and stresses. In fact, many of the Psalms found in our Bible are written and attributed to David. Then in his most famous and well-known adventure, David takes on the giant Goliath. This is a classic story of the underdog winning. David isn't a fighter, he is not a great warrior, in fact, he is quite small. He had to take his armour off because it was weighing him down and he couldn't move. It was such a hinderance and instead it turns out, he's a sniper. He takes a rock and his slingshot and manages to kill this giant.

Saul becomes jealous of David for obvious reasons. The fact is that David is good at everything he does and it's clear to Saul that God is on David's side. And, because of David's success Paul

thinks the best way to deal with him is to put him in charge of the armies. This is where the story gets interesting and this is the part we haven't heard. Saul plots to get David killed. Saul is so jealous that he sends David into battles that are like a suicide mission and when that doesn't work he plots again to kill him, but every time he tries, nothing happens. Now this is the point where many people start to feel sorry for David, poor guy. The kings trying to kill him, he is faced with all these atrocities. What has David ever done to deserve this? He has served the king and God, he is a good person; he couldn't be one of those misbehaving types. However, if we look at it from a slightly different perspective, from David's point of view, we come to realize that David was smart, charismatic, calculating and ambitious. David would have been a great contestant on the TV show 'Survivor' because he can outwit, outplay and outlast everyone. David has helped, David was helped even, by Saul's own son who got him out of trouble and this got Saul's son in great trouble and anger from his father for obvious reasons. Poor Saul couldn't win, David always won, where's the justice?

David even went and then worked with the enemies of the kingdom. He lied to a priest. He pretended at one point that he was crazy to escape harm and death. He even went back to his home town of Judah and became the leader of his old posse which was made up of thugs and outlaws alike; and suddenly he was the head of the gang. He was cunning and was able to play both sides well. He was such a good actor that he got out of sticky situations. One in particular where he was working for the Philistines but was still on the side of Israel; he started to tell the king of the Philistines all these false reports, so he looked like a traitor and because of that he was excluded from the attack on Israel, the battle didn't go well and in the end Saul and his three sons were killed. David? Just fine, no problem. Now after the death of Saul, David was so smart, and he realized that there was so much angst and misery that he led a national mourning. He took on a priestly duty that Saul, last week we heard, got in trouble for doing, but instead his grief seemed sincere. And after that mourning, David was appointed king.

We are now at the part of the story that we heard today in the scriptures, where David unites Israel, but before he manages to do this he has to deal with seven years of civil war. When David first became king, there were still a lot of people that supported King Saul, in fact King Saul's son Ishbaal is installed as king over Israel by the commanders of Saul's armies. While David controls the south, Saul's son controls the north. See? Game of Thrones, here we go again, the south and the north. So how does David manage to achieve this and unite the two kingdoms? Not only does David enter his kingship with this extensive resume and a wealth of experience he is a veteran warrior, he killed a giant, he was mentored by the best strategist in the Philistines, he charms everyone around him and in fact women swoon when they see him, and men can't help, but follow him. He sounds like Gaston, from Beauty and the Beast. But David had a plan, and this is what separated him, I think, from Saul. His plan was that he sought God's guidance and blessing and unlike Saul he obeyed God. When God told him how to defeat his enemies he did exactly what God told him to do and he was successful. So, it seems that David truly was God's

beloved. I mean if you think about it David managed to rule over Israel for about 40 years in total. People loved him. God loved him. He truly was the man.

David is the one that others who came after him were compared to; David is the one that even during Jesus time people would think back on and try and model themselves after David. He is remembered as pious, faithful, courageous, smart, sincere and competent. It always amazes me that people can forget the bad stuff and remember only the good. If the good was the stuff that people talked about all the time, because if you think about Saul he probably did some good too, but we don't remember any of it. And yet he, like Saul, was not perfect. He had his own issues and he had his own foibles and we heard some of that in the sense that he lied, he was manipulative, he was smart, he found a way around things time and time again. When the veil is lifted on a perfect relationship, on the best leader, on the people we hold up on a pedestal, things aren't always as they seem. So, the question today when thinking about leadership is this; how does an ambitious person live an ethical life? Did David operate out of self interest or did he work for the common good? It's easy when we become successful at something to forget where we started from and forget who helped us along the way. It's also easy for us to lose focus on what's important.

The latter part of the scripture today that was read; after David's succession of uniting Israel, God proclaimed that David would be given a time of rest from his enemies. God was giving David the opportunity to focus on the people of God. And how did David return that gift? He couldn't sit still, he couldn't rest, he couldn't focus on the people. Instead he decided that God needed a house. He wanted to place the Ark of the Covenant in a house worthy of the Divine; a temple. And when David consulted with the prophet Nathan, Nathan agreed only to find out from God later that he shouldn't have done that. God didn't want David to build him a house. In fact, God says in the response we heard in the scriptures was that the Lord will make you a house, not the other way around. So is this the point where David has gotten off track and is seeking his self interest. Why is it so important that he create this for God? So, God is clearly not happy with David and what is even more amazing is that God declares that unlike Saul the kingdom will not be taken away from him. So again, the question; how is it that an ambitious person and live an ethical life?

Though it would seem that David's charismatic approach to leadership or his great ability to sway even the roughest crowds would be his greatest asset I would suggest that it was actually his choice and ability to listen to God that made him so successful. The practice of listening, the practice of discerning, helps us to stay focussed on the common good and what God is calling us to do rather than our own selfish ambition. Some of the best leaders in the world are loved because they led people that they loved and provided for. So, the good news in all this today is the fact that each one of us has the ability to listen, and to listen to God. And when we do, we will find meaning and fulfillment in this life. We just have to remember how what we see might not be what God sees. Things are often quite different, so expect the unexpected. When David was sitting out in the field tending those sheep would he ever have guessed that he would be

prepared to care for the people of God as the King of Israel? I think not. But, when we listen we will find the path that God is calling us to go on. So, remember and take time to discern: Why? Why are you doing what you are doing? What is it God is calling you to do? And if you listen perhaps you too will be like David and allow all that other stuff to wash off you. So, go out into the world and be bold, be charismatic, be ambitious, and bring the world that God has called us here right now on Earth. Thanks be to God.