



Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church  
Austin, Texas  
9 July 2017  
Sermon – “No Strolling, No Loitering”  
Mark Ramsey

Matthew 20:29-34  
Psalm 18:1-3, 27-36

One day a girl was in her classroom at school  
when it was time for art.  
She was six years old  
and was sitting at the back of the class...drawing.  
The teacher said that most days  
this little girl hardly paid attention,  
but during this particular art lesson—  
--she hung on every word,  
and then with laser focus  
she began drawing and coloring intently.

The teacher was fascinated and she went over to her and said,  
“What are you drawing?”  
and the girl said, ***“I’m drawing a picture of God.”***

And the teacher said, “But nobody knows what God looks like.”  
And the girl said, ***“They will in a minute.”***<sup>1</sup>

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If you turn to the Bible to get a picture of what God looks like,  
one of the first places we can look for a full portrait of God  
is in the WHOLE narrative of God’s relationship with David.

**The David story is the most extensive single narration in the Bible.**  
We know more about David than any other person in scripture.<sup>2</sup>

One DANGER in these days of *“spiritual, but not religious”*  
is that we can imagine our faith can be carefully nurtured  
like some hothouse orchid—  
--kept safely away from the sullyng of the world,  
or our foibles,  
or any organized church.





Not perfect.  
...**AUTHENTIC.**

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FAITH in God is NOT a museum piece,  
or an heirloom,  
or a hothouse flower—  
--it is a lived in RELATIONSHIP.

One commentator notes about David:  
*“As an instance of humanity in himself, David isn’t much.  
He has little wisdom to pass on to us  
on how to live successfully.  
He was an unfortunate parent  
and an unfaithful husband.  
From a purely historical point of view  
he was a barbaric chieftain with a talent for poetry.*

***But David’s importance ISN’T in his morality  
or his military prowess—  
--but in his experience of and witness to God.  
Every event in his life was a confrontation with God.”***

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There is an ENCOURAGEMENT for you and me  
embedded deep in David’s life.  
If God can use DAVID...***then what can God do through us...?***

*“Instructions for living a life”* poet Mary Oliver once wrote,  
***“Pay attention.  
Be astonished.  
Tell about it.”***

So, when two blind men were sitting by the roadside one day  
when Jesus walked by, their appeal to Jesus—  
--repeated many times in the gospels—  
--was ***“Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!  
Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!”***

They were appealing to Jesus because they recognized in Jesus  
an extension of the exuberant,  
full out spirit  
of their shared ancestor David.

**That designation isn't just about genealogy—it's about GOD.**

But why David?

There are several strands – but the most prominent one  
is David's earthiness.

David is so emphatically human.

David fighting, praying,  
loving, sinning.

David is conditioned by the morals and assumptions of his brutal culture  
just like we are conditioned  
by the morals and assumptions of ours.

***There is David angry...and devious...and generous...and dancing...***

There is NOTHING—absolutely NOTHING—

--that God cannot and will not use in David's life (or ours)  
to work God's salvation and grace into our lives.<sup>4</sup>

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Henry James once criticized American religion as

*"little more than cathedrals and mild social conscience."*

The late novelist John Updike has one his characters observe:

*"Westerners have lost whole octaves of passion.*

*We no longer have capacity for full-range of expression—*

*--either on the high end or the low end of life's experience.*

*Third world women can still make an inhuman*

*piercing grieving noise*

*right from the floor of the soul.*

*We struggle to regain that capacity."<sup>5</sup>*

David's earthy faith in the midst of a flawed and devoted life

shows us the way.

In Psalm 18—a "Psalm of David"—

--David expresses his whole-hearted, nothing held back  
LOVE of God.

For David, God is rock, fortress, deliverer,

shield, horn, and stronghold.

God is to be praised, worshipped, adored, and followed.

God will guide,

God will protect,

God will humble,  
God will prepare David for all of his life...

In a rush of full-throated praise, David writes:

***It is you who light my lamp;  
the Lord, my God, lights up my darkness.  
By you I can crush a troop,  
and by my God I can leap over a wall...***

In all David's life—from birth to death—

--whenever his sentences began and ended with God,  
he was celebrated, worthy,  
the victor, the shining one, the King.

***And then there were the OTHER times—***

--when he forgot to begin and end with God  
and thought it was he himself doing all this.

Then the light was fake,  
and the darkness pervasive.

Then it was his own soul that was crushed,  
and his attempt to leap a wall on his own,  
was nothing more than a leap of utter FOLLY.

But God always found David and called him back to Godself.

David always found his way back to PRAISE:

***You have given me the shield of your salvation,***  
David wrote in this Psalm,  
***and your right hand has supported me;  
your help has made me great.  
YOU provided me a wide place for my steps under me,  
and my feet did not slip...***

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**We hear this echoed in the mid-18th century,**

as John Wesley began his ministry in an England  
that seemed overwhelmed by social problems.  
The gin trade had led to huge problems with alcoholism.  
The industrial revolution had laid waste  
the rural English countryside—  
--resulting in a vast influx of people  
seeking employment in the cities.  
Child labor was the scourge of the land.  
There was vast social dislocation and chaos.  
Things seemed overwhelming.

Faced with this world,

John Wesley countered these problems—

--NOT first with a new social program for human betterment—  
rather with a revival which

--but

***responded to the problems of the day  
with an overwhelming affirmation of God's grace.***

The Wesley brothers responded to the problems of their day

with exuberant praise!

Among the great legacies of the Wesleyan revival  
are some of the most beloved hymns—

--"O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing,"

"Hark the Herald Angels Sing,"

and "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling."

**You might remember how that last hymn ends:**

*"Till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise..."*

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That is the LEAP we make into the trusted arms of God.

That PRAISE—that TRUST—that EXHUBERANCE!

It's a LEAP.

**—What would it take for us to have a faith that took LEAPS?**

Not strolling through God's goodness like a tourist.

Not loitering around the edge of safety in God's presence—

--but an audacious,

often awkward,

sometimes misplaced,

but usually deeply trusting LIFE centered on who God is

and what God does.

Honestly...most of the time—you and I don't know how to do this.

This way of living does NOT come naturally to us.

***But it was the ONLY way David knew...***

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Frederick Buechner has observed:

To see what there was about David that made Israel adore him

like no other king she ever had,

as good a place to look as any is the account



and why, when Jesus of Nazareth  
 came riding into Jerusalem on that mule  
 a thousand years later,  
 it was as the *Son of David* that they hailed him.

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*"The streets of our cities and the pews of our churches  
 are occupied these days with emaciated and plastic  
 men and women...  
 ...there are too many limp souls"*  
 the American poet R.P. Blackmur wrote decades ago...

In such a shallow world,  
 the image of David leaping over the wall,  
 by God's grace and power,  
 should hold our attention.

David, in his vigor, his wholeheartedness, his God-heartedness—  
 --coming to a stone wall and without hesitation,  
 LEAPING the wall and continuing on his way:

running toward Goliath,  
 running from Saul,  
 pursuing God,  
 meeting Jonathan,  
 rounding up stray sheep,  
 getting lost on his own stray paths—  
 --and then finding his way back to God.

David: running, leaping.  
 Certainly not strolling, never loitering...

Fully involved in his exuberant life  
 and his exuberant faith.

*Instructions for your life:*

*Pay attention.  
 Be astonished.  
 Tell about it.*

**That's what David knows.  
 That is how David lives.  
 ...And God...is at the center of it all.**

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> From Sir Ken Robinson's TED Talk, "Ken Robinson Says Schools Kill Creativity," 2006

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over the Wall*, pp. 2-3

<sup>3</sup> Thomas G. Long, *Testimony* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004, pp. 102-103

<sup>4</sup> Peterson, op cit

<sup>5</sup> John Updike, *Roger's Version*

<sup>6</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Peculiar Treasures*