



Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church
Austin, Texas
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Sermon – “The Challenges of Adulthood”
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2 Samuel 11:26-12:15
Ephesians 3:14-21

Everyone in this room knows the familiar formula
that leads to the concluding line:
"And they lived happily ever after."

*BEFORE "happily ever after": DRAGONS have been fought,
deadly curses broken,
and all kinds of effort exerted.*

Then, SUDDENLY, Prince Charming and Sleeping Beauty find each other...
...like coming out of a choppy sea into a tranquil port,
THEN "they lived happily ever after."

We might be tempted to take from this that "the morning of life"
is a time of turbulence--
--and ONCE a person had finished
his or her education,
chosen a vocation,
or fought a dragon,
or slain a GIANT--
--THEN, it's all smooth sailing.

...But, a funny thing happens on the way to that fairy tale...
...and the Bible makes the point that ADULTHOOD
is NOT a time of life when we begin
to effortlessly "*live happily ever after.*"

If adolescence is the most INTENSE stage along the way,
adulthood is the most CHALLENGING--
--finding meaningful contributions to make to the world,
--nurturing significant relationships,
--and the life-long quest to understand WHO we really are.

Another way of saying that is IN OUR LIVES, we search for:
+ WORK to do,

+ OTHERS to love,
+ and a SELF to be.

But, IF we end up giving a vast majority of energy to *ONE* of those areas,
we risk STARVING the others.

Author Gail Sheehy tells of a 46-year old TV newscaster
who had climbed to the top of his profession.

HOWEVER, he was NOT as satisfied or fulfilled as one might think.

He said one day:

*"I am near the top of the mountain that I saw as a young man,
but, lo and behold, this is NOT snow up here,
it's MOSTLY SALT
that burns the wounds inflicted getting to the top!"*

It turns out that going DOWN the mountain
is quite a different art than CLIMBING it.
"Where" asked that celebrity,
"are the navigational charts for decent?"

This may seem like a peculiarly self-absorbed

21st century phenomenon...
...but 3000 years ago, David—likewise—was out of BALANCE—
--and the results were catastrophic.

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King David--legend of the Old Testament--
--was not very good at being an ADULT!

The verses right before our text give us all the clues we need.

The PRELUDE to David and Bathsheba's encounter begins wistfully:

***"In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle
David sent Joab...but David remained in Jerusalem..."***

David was NOT adept in navigating adulthood.

It was incredible how QUICKLY David rose
from the obscurity of tending sheep
to be the uncontested ruler of everything
from the Nile to the Euphrates.

A personnel manager for a national firm said the FIRST thing
she tried to determine about a new executive trainee—
--was how quickly she could
separate the "DO-ERS" from the "BE-ERS."

The "DO-ERS" got moved up into the decision-making hierarchy.
The "BE-ERS" tended to get left behind...

**David was a classic example of a "DO-ER"—but his doing, early on,
was in service of the God who called him
and sent him into the world.**

With ALL of Israel, David went into genuine mourning
and it was this lack of vindictiveness
that led the northern tribes who had followed Saul
eventually to ask DAVID to rule them too...

David could have made his own hometown the new capital--
--and would NOT have unified the country.

INSTEAD, David conquered a Jebusite stronghold called Jerusalem
that the Israelites had NEVER controlled before--
--and made this neutral site the center of his new beginnings.

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This was David's greatest strength—
he had avoided the TRAP of wanting everything to SERVE HIM—
--and instead genuinely wanted to serve others.

DAVID, then, is a real model for us in finding WORK to do
and in making a difference in the world by giving of himself.

Oscar Wilde once wrote:
"It is tragic how few people ever possess their own soul"

before they die."

Most people are *OTHER* people.

As David lost his intimacy with God—

--in his quest for power or glory—

--he lost a sense of who he really was as God's child.

The call of God to each of us is a UNIQUE call--

--yet we tend to drown it out with all kinds of distraction.

*...Do you realize that more suicides occur on Saturdays and Sundays than
all the other days of the week put together?*

When life has been structured by "other things" all week,

and suddenly the individual is left to decide things freely--

--many are so unskilled at listening to the unique call of God,

let alone to their innermost thoughts--**they BREAK.**

...As in what happened to David,

when he did NOT go to battle one spring

as he had been doing for years and years.

When the structure of his EXTERNAL habits was removed,

he didn't know what to do with himself.

It was during such a time that he saw Bathsheba from his rooftop...

The cultivation and care of one's own God-created soul

is utterly important--lest we grow old in great emptiness.

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In the GREAT growth challenges of ADULTHOOD--to find:

WORK to do,

OTHERS to LOVE,

and a SELF to be--

--we discover, sooner or later,

that we cannot do any of these on our own...

ONE THING is obvious--LIFE is NOT like fairy tales.

We will live "happily ever after" ONLY to the degree that we work—

--to understand God's shaping of our lives:

for WORK to do,

OTHERS to love,

and a SELF to be...

...CONGREGATIONS also have life-cycles--

It's not just for David--or for you and me.

The CHALLENGES of ADULTHOOD are ever-present for churches, too.

ADULTHOOD, for churches no less than for people--

--is NOT a time of life when we begin to
automatically and effortlessly "live happily ever after."

It is NOT a time to engage in busywork

or distracted exploits at the expense of others

or distracted energy at the expense of our relationship with God...

...who has actually been quite specific with us about

HOW we are to live:

--with God-shaped purpose;

--with vulnerability;

--and in trust of God...and trust in one another.

BOTH in terms of pressures and possibilities, adulthood--

FOR A CONGREGATION--is the most strenuous time of life!

Churches, too, need WORK to do,

OTHERS to LOVE,

and a SELF to be...

The WORK to do seems obvious enough.

There are children to nurture, youth to guide.

There are committees to organize and baptisms to do
and mission to serve...

Most of us are good at work...

But of course, this is decidedly NOT the ONLY work for

a congregation.

How do we give ourselves away for the life of the world?

How do we avoid the TRAPS of control and anxiety?

How are we bold to depend on God's strength
so we can act and decide and work?

How do we enact our life together with a complete HUMILITY

that knows we are NOT complete,

unless we are open and appreciative

receivers of WISDOM about God

from those who are at different stations in society –
 --the uncredentialed,
 --the “unsuccessful” in the eyes of the world...
 ...those we call “needy.”

Often for churches reaching maturity – these are our finest TEACHERS.

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Of OTHERS to LOVE--there is strength there, too,
 but also important challenge.

The more we love--not some abstract idea--but with specificity--
 --the more WE love--the more needs

we will see in others
 and in ourselves,
 and in our world.

We need to love each other enough to live through failure.

We need to love each other enough to accept other's differences.

We need to love each other enough to talk about Jesus

INSTEAD of the conventional wisdom of strive and consume
 which passes as the world's wisdom...

We need to love each other enough to ALWAYS look WIDER
 to see who ELSE we are called to love!

We need to love each other enough and love GOD enough
 to CHOOSE GOD for study,

prayer,
 worship,
 stewardship,
 and mutual caring
 and service—

--even when the world tells us that there must be
 BETTER things we could be doing with our time.

And we need to do it as we get out of our safe zones,
 and we listen to challenging voices that will provoke us to growth
 and a wide generosity of spirit.

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**And what IDENTITY shall we have?
What "self" do we choose to be?**

***HERE...our stories—those of our individual lives,
and our congregation's story,
AND DAVID'S story—merge into ONE.***

Because the story of David with Bathsheba,
and David's murder of Uriah to cover his sin
shows us God's truth:
**we do NOT "choose" a self—
--God gives us our identity...
...and we forget that at our peril.**

We are NOT prepared for what we see of David in this narrative.
What began as a lustful whim
develops into an enormous sex-and-murder crime.

...How does THIS happen?
As with most sins—gradually...

The key word in the text is the seemingly innocuous word: **SEND**.

But as the narrative goes on,
we begin to realize that "SEND" is NOT a morally neutral word
in the context of David's life.

Earlier—in David's youth—God SENT for David,
through the voice of Samuel.
David was sent for—and was anointed as God's own.
David was SENT to Saul's camp,
and he was sent to meet the Philistine Goliath.

But now, as one scholar notes, through the use of the word SEND...
*"...we can trace David's descent from love and obedience
into calculation and cruelty."*

*"Verb by verb, we watch David remove himself from
compassionate listening and personal intimacy with others
to a position OUTSIDE and ABOVE others—
--giving orders, exercising power."*

The narrative begins with that telling phrase:
***"In the spring of the year, the times when kings go out to battle,
David sent Joab..."***

It picks up momentum when “*David sent*” to inquire about Bathsheba...

The plot thickens when “*David sent for Bathsheba.*”

And soon after, ominously, “*Bathsheba sends word to David...*”

From there—the dye is cast in a series of ruthless moves by David:

“*David SENT word to Joab,*
‘*SEND me Uriah the Hittite...*’
...and Joab SENT Uriah to David...

After David arranged the murder of Bathsheba’s husband—

“*David SENT for Bathsheba again and married her...*”

This absolute tailspin only ends with one final “SEND” in this story.

God emerges in the midst of this wreckage and the text tells us

“*And the Lord sent Nathan to David...*”

That’s the END of David trying to be his own God,
the master of his own fate,
his own arbiter of what WORK was his to do,
the others he was going to LOVE,
and what SELF HE decided to be.

Nathan, SENT by God,
reminds David the truWE cannot live without:

God is God.

When we try to be God, we quickly get LOST
in foolishness and destructiveness.
When we try to rely on our own power and purview,
we cannot remember WHO we are...

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The truth that emerges from this wreckage is among
the most important that we will ever get from the Bible:

David’s sin was enormous—but it was wildly outdone by God’s grace.

God’s grace is like breathing for us—
--it is everything we need...
...and that which we cannot live one day without.

What David did—no less than the destruction we bring about—
--cannot be minimized or diminished,

but it's miniscule compared to God's grace.

The text—after ALL that has gone on—does NOT concentrate on the sin.

It's always a mistake to concentrate attention on our sins.

God's work is the main event.

Our sins aren't that interesting--God's work is what is interesting.

God's work leads us through our years—

--and from the waters of baptism on--

we are GIVEN WORK to do,
we are GIVEN OTHERS to love,
and we are GIVEN our SELF to be.

With thanksgiving and grace,

we get to do what David did after all this pain and destruction.

He gets to rediscover the GIFT of his life...and so do we.

In his repentance,

David prayed exactly what WE get to pray every morning as we arise:

*"You are my stronghold and my life, O God,
in you I put my trust,
and in you, O God, I put my WHOLE life."*

If we can truly pray that—then you have to ask:

Where is God SENDING your WHOLE LIFE today?

Amen.