

We are in a sermon series reading through some of the important stories found in 1st and 2nd Samuel from the Old Testament. This is the period when ancient Israel is moving into the period of monarchy. Last week we read about how King Saul and the Israelite army were being threatened by the Philistines.

The Philistines sent out their giant warrior named Goliath while the Israelites sent out David, their young shepherd boy with a sling and 5 pebbles. David's accuracy with his sling proved more effective as Goliath was defeated and his fellow Philistine soldiers fled.

In the chapters that follow in I Samuel, Saul remains king but he falls victim to mental illness. There is one scene where he visits a witch and she conducts a seance to bring a dead Samuel back to life. Saul visits the witch because he is unable to hear any word from God. The ghostly Samuel informs Saul that the end of his rule is near.

Saul becomes more and more paranoid of David. On three occasions Saul tries to kill David but is unsuccessful.

The main reason that Saul is unsuccessful in killing David is the relationship that David develops with Saul's son Jonathan. On several occasions, Jonathan goes behind his Dad's back to provide information to David which saves David's life.

Eventually, David ends up in a cave when Saul enters not realizing that David is in the shadows. David has a golden opportunity to retaliate and kill Saul. But David stands down and does not carry out the surprise attack against Saul.

I Samuel ends with another attack on Israel by the Philistine army. This time the Philistines are successful. This results in the deaths of Saul and Jonathan.

We pick up the story in 2 Samuel 1. The reason that we have a 1st and 2nd Samuel is because there were two scrolls. One scroll could only accommodate a certain amount of information. So 1st Samuel are the stories that fit on the first scroll while 2nd Samuel contains the stories written on a second scroll.

Read II Samuel 1:1-12

In an article entitled, "Unimaginable," writer Kathryn Schifferdecker says this:

There is a song in the musical "Hamilton" that always brings tears to my eyes. It's the song right after Alexander and Eliza Hamilton's firstborn son Philip is killed in a duel. The song is called "It's Quiet Uptown," and the first lines go like this:

There are moments that the words don't reach
There is suffering too terrible to name
You hold your child as tight as you can
And push away the unimaginable.

As Kathryn Schifferdecker observes, "Unimaginable" is a good word to describe the loss of a child. Something so hard, so heart-breaking, that it is simply unimaginable.

Schifferdecker continues her article this way: "Unimaginable" came to mind for me earlier this week, when I learned that Henry, a schoolmate of my daughter's, had drowned in a lake at his and his twin's 9th birthday party.

Kathryn's 12-year-old daughter Sarah is best friends with Henry's older sister, Jenny. There were no lifeguards at the lake, and the parents who were watching the kids simply didn't see him go into deeper water. When they realized that he was missing, they called 911, and a police officer dove into the lake and found him, but it was too late.

Kathryn's daughter Sarah said to her mom, "I'm scared, Mom. I don't know what to say." And Kathryn told her, "Sweetie, it's important to show up at times like these. Just give Jenny a hug and tell her how sorry you are for her loss and ask her how she's feeling. Let her know you care."

Kathryn says she sat with Henry's parents and listened as his mom, Bev, spoke of her own feelings of grief and loss and guilt. And what struck Kathryn was how very exhausted she looked, how sad and burdened.

She said, "My son is dead." Unimaginable.

Today's text is a story about grief. And grief is what many of us are feeling right now for one reason or another. I read someone define grief as the feeling and mourning as the action. And that makes sense to me.

The Christian faith is based on a belief in death and new life. But too many of us ignore our grief and put on artificial faces to hide the pain that we feel. But as followers of Jesus Christ we do not need to ignore the death. Death was real for Jesus and the experience of things and ideas and places and people dying is a part of our life as well.

The text we read describes the grief expressed by David after the deaths of both Saul and his son Jonathan. It's interesting that David offers such kind words about Saul, a powerful man that three times tried to kill David. David's grief over Jonathan is much more understood. The text recalls the strength of the love that David had for Jonathan.

What are we grieving as we come into worship today? Some of us are grieving the loss of family members. If you have lost a family member to death over the past 15 months it has been especially hard. Our traditional grieving practices were canceled or delayed or simplified.

Over the past 15 months many of us have had to grieve alone the loss of loved ones. Maybe it has been parents or grandparents. Maybe it has been children. Maybe it was

a husband or wife, girlfriend or boyfriend. Maybe it has been the loss of brothers or sisters. Maybe it has been the loss of special friends or people that we have admired.

The text today reminds us of the importance of grieving the loss of loved ones. We grieve because they meant so much to us. We grieve because we miss them.

Sometimes this separation comes through death and sometimes it comes through the breaking of relationships. No matter how much a divorce or breaking away from an abusive relationship is needed, it still requires us to grieve what we once had.

But sometimes what we need to grieve is not people but maybe places. Maybe we grieve the ending of a job or business. Maybe we grieve a home that we have sold before moving to a new location.

Sometimes what we need to grieve is an idea or a belief system. Some of us maybe come from backgrounds that we are leaving behind. There was a security in our old ways but we know we are being called into something new. But before moving forward we must say good-bye to whatever it is from our past.

Sometimes we need to grieve injustice in whatever form it takes. Injustice against innocent people, injustice against God's creation.

In the story that I shared, Kathryn Schifferdecker was correct that what is really needed is relationship and welcome. And that is the role that we in the church play for one another during our times of grief.

No matter what you are grieving, here is a place where I hope we find ways to offer the encouraging word. Here is the place where we can say to one another that no matter your brokenness and pain, here you are welcome to share and we will listen.

Here is the place where you can cry or show your anger or whatever emotion which may have you in it's grip.

We don't ignore our pain nor the pain of others. This is a time to listen to one another. To support one another. To provide care to one another. And a time to comfort one another.

Yes, there is joy in the morning. But before the joy we must allow time for the grief.
AMEN.

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-<https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/unimaginable>

-Given: June 27, 2021 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)