

Over the past several weeks we have been reading through the stories found in 1st and 2nd Samuel from the Old Testament. These are stories from ancient Israel about 1000 years before the birth of Christ. We have begun to hear stories about David and today we will read about him becoming the new king over all of Israel.

This week and throughout the month of July we will encounter stories that teach us something about leadership. Leadership then and what we can learn about leadership for today. Leadership does not just mean political leaders like kings or presidents but also any one of us who find ourselves in positions of leadership.

Also today we are going to be reading a part of this historical narrative that is not comfortable to read. This will challenge us on the day we celebrate our nation's independence to be honest about our history, even the parts of our history that we don't like and that we have tried to sugarcoat.

Last week we read about the death of Saul, Israel's first king. We read about how Saul was jealous of David and tried to kill David. But David became friends with Saul's son Jonathan and this relationship provided David the insider information that David needed to survive.

In these Old Testament stories that we are reading from 1st and 2nd Samuel, the nation of Israel is split into two parts. One part is Israel and the other part is Judah. After the death of King Saul, there is a civil war between Israel and Judah who are both considered heirs as God's chosen people.

Saul's son becomes king of Israel but David is anointed the new king of Judah. The capital city of Judah is Hebron. David is going to serve in Hebron as King of Judah for 7 ½ years.

During this time, David's power and influence is increasing while the power and influence of Saul's family is decreasing. In today's text from the 5th chapter, representatives from all 12 tribes that make up the two countries will assemble. They will assemble to choose David as king of both Judah and Israel.

This will make Israel united under one king and it will be the high point in their biblical history. But as we will see, there are native people already living in the land. These natives are called Jebusites. Pay attention to what happens to the Jebusites.

Read 2nd Samuel 5:1-10

When we tell the history of ancient Israel, we tell the story of David being chosen by God to be the greatest king in the history of Israel. We tell about how David was able to end a civil war and how he led Israel into becoming a powerful kingdom. We tell about God's might and God's blessings upon David for 40 years.

But in telling or hearing this story, when have we heard about the native inhabitants of the land? Have we ever heard about the Jebusites? Have we ever heard that David ordered the attack on the lame and the blind because these are the people that David hates?

What do we do with a biblical story where the one chosen by God orders the massacre of the most vulnerable? Do we continue to ignore this?

On this day that we celebrate our nation's independence, we have a lot to celebrate. We all should be thankful to live in this country where we possess so many freedoms that others can only dream about.

We are free to gather today in worship and I am free as a pastor to say whatever I feel led to say and not have fear of repercussions from the government. In lots of places that is not the case. But in celebrating our history as a nation, I fear that we have watered down the difficult parts or have limited the voices who can interpret our history.

In reading today's biblical story, I challenge us to read all of the story. Not just the parts that we like or tell the story in such a way to fit the narrative that we were taught. And why do we read all of the story?

For one, because it's there. We read the whole story because the whole story is here in the Bible. And the second reason that we read the whole story is because we believe that God can take the worst of human sin and transform it into something good.

In this text, David proclaims that the city of Jerusalem will be established but that the blind and the lame shall not be allowed in. What do we do with that? Do we believe that it is God's intention that the blind and the lame are not allowed in?

In our country, we are experiencing some moral reckoning when it comes to the telling of our history. Many of us are coming to realize that there were lots of stories that we were never told.

How many of us learned about the Tulsa Massacre in US history or the Orangeburg Massacre in South Carolina history? Why are we so fearful of sharing our history from various viewpoints that challenge the narratives that many of us were told?

But we read today that in David's ascension to power, the blind and the lame were killed and given no access to the places of power. David was not pure. Even the people that are described in the scriptures as being blessed and guided by God, were not pure in their actions.

What is there to learn about leadership today? We learn that leadership does not mean that one is pure. We also learn that while we recognize and celebrate the historical contributions of our leaders, we also work to correct what they did wrong.

There are lots of examples today where leaders are trying very hard to protect their narrative of history. I could list lots of examples where most of us were taught something that either wasn't true or was skewed.

For instance, how many of us know that at one time the University of South Carolina was a predominantly African-American institution until Gov. Wade Hampton shut it down and then reopened it 3 years later as a whites only institution in the 1870s?

It is important that we read all of the biblical story because it challenges us to correct the wrongs that have been done in the past. It also allows us to see biblical characters as real people with real shortcomings.

So what good can God make from the reading of scripture that David did not like people who were lame and blind and he had them forceably removed or killed? Maybe, it leads us to be the ones that work to change that.

Maybe knowing this leads us to be the ones who work to provide a welcoming place for those who are on the outside looking in. Maybe we are the ones to say that what David did was awful and we commit ourselves to assisting those who are vulnerable. Maybe it means that we work for a world where all are truly accepted and welcomed. You know, like Jesus treated people.

Our next song that we are singing is "Our Country 'Tis of Thee." The reality is that this song from our hymnal paints a very rosy picture of American history. And there may be times that we need to see a rosy picture. But I am a firm believer that we are honest with our history because I believe that God takes the worst of human sin and can turn it into something good.

So as we sing these words about this sweet land of liberty, we can ask ourselves, is it? Is it a sweet land of liberty for all? Is everybody treated fairly in this country? Did the ones killed in Tulsa or Orangeburg or forcibly removed in the name of manifest destiny experience a sweet land of liberty? If we question if there is sweet liberty for all, then maybe we are called to do something about it so that this is a place where all can say that freedom rings.

May God guide us to learn from an accurate telling of history both biblically and as a nation so that we can work to make this a place where the land is bright for all.

As Rev. Peter Marshall once said, "Freedom is not the right to do as we please, but freedom is the opportunity to do what is right." AMEN.

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