

June 27, 2021
II Samuel 1:1, 17-27
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For many years, I counted my blessings, knowing how fortunate I was. I still do that, but for a long time, I considered myself very fortunate because I had not experienced the death of close family members. I was 60 when my mother passed away, but until then my parents were both living and as were all my siblings. Then Mom passed in 2019, and Dad just passed earlier this year, and you've been hearing stories in sermons about both of them. That's the interesting thing about grief, what things do you remember of a loved one who has passed away and what things do you choose to forget? And what things do you wish you were able to forget if you only could?

I know that some of you, Jack Sizer for one, are fans of the HBO mini series, "Mare of Easttown." It came up in our coping with loss group and it's about a woman who is a cop in a town in Eastern Pennsylvania who is solving a murder mystery. But much of it is also about her family relationships and her grieving process as she mourns the losses in her life. At one point when Mare speaks unflatteringly about one who has passed, her mother scolds her saying, "You can say anything you want about someone when they're still alive, but once they are dead, they're a saint."

I've found myself this spring telling people stories about my mom and her hospitality and my dad helping me to make a slingshot, and they're always the positive stories, maybe not that make them look like saints, but close. If I'm really honest, if any of us are really honest, there are some negative things to say also, but do we just avoid saying them now that the person has passed away?

That's what makes this passage from II Samuel so interesting. David has lost perhaps the

two most important people in his life, his best friend and his greatest enemy. We read a lament of David's, actually a song called a *qina* in Hebrew, which is a type of song in honor of the dead that looks backward on the accomplishments of those being honored. Traditionally in a *qina*, no ill is spoken of those who have passed, and it is a song of grief and as you might have noticed, there is no mention of God in the song, it is just about those who have gone.¹ I guess the old adage about speaking no ill of the dead goes back a long way.

David gives expression to his grief in this song and what interests me is that he had a long history with both Saul and Jonathan. Saul was his king, the one who brought him into the palace, first to play his lyre and sing songs but later to lead armies. Saul even gave his daughter Michal to be David's first wife. Later, Saul became jealous when it became obvious that David was the preferred leader of the people, not Saul and he tried many times to have David killed. The kingdom of Israel could have been divided and gone into civil war because of the rivalry between David and Saul. But when Saul dies, David has only good things to say about him. He gives expression not just to his grief, but to the grief of the nation who has lost its king.

Jonathan is another story. David and Jonathan were best friends, which in a way is strange because it would seem to be that the logical successor to Saul's throne would be his son, Jonathan, not David. But Jonathan himself recognizes that David is the one who should be king. Why does he know that? The story tells us that it is because of his love for David. It tells us that they were close and loved each other and in those days, when marriages were often not about love, but the marriage between a man and a woman was

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Description of *qina* in *The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume 2, p.1205,*

often about political and social alliances and the begetting of children, and *romantic love* didn't enter into the equation, many men and women had close friends of the same gender who were their confidants and companions and everything we would consider to be a best friend. Some have speculated that David and Jonathan were more than just friends, that they were lovers as well. That may have been, but the scripture isn't specific about that, so we just don't really know. And that's not important for today's message. Today's message is focused on forgiveness.

David has lost them both, Saul and Jonathan. His king, who is also his enemy, and his friend, the two men who have defined his life for years by this point. It has been said that as we age, one of the tasks before us is making peace with our past. I was listening to "This American Life," on National Public Radio yesterday as I was driving, maybe some of you heard it. One of the stories they were discussing was the changes that might be coming in the future. They discussed a recent poll that questioned whether people were ready for changes that the future might bring. People were asked if they would eat food created in a lab or if they would consent to a brain implant if it would help their memory. But then the last question of the poll was an open-ended one. They asked, "What possible change or new technology in the future would you really look forward to." And the results were interesting. They were all across the spectrum from world peace to jet packs to curing diseases. But there was one response that came up more than *any other* single response. Time travel. And when they went back and asked about that, a few said they wanted to go into the future and see what it was like, and a few wanted to go back into the past a right a great wrong, like stop Hitler. But most of them wanted to go back to the past to fix something in their own lives. Something they wish now they had never done or

do something that they had avoided. They wanted to change their own past. So many people haven't made peace with their past.

In the months since my father died, I have found myself trying to do that. I'm remembering the good things about my relationship with my parents, and the not so good things. And one of the things that I'm trying to come to peace with is to forgive them for all the things that I wish they would have done and been. I'm coming to terms with the man that he was and I'm forgiving him for the things he wasn't. It's not easy because it will never change now, at least not in this life. But as we age one of the things we learn is that forgiveness is giving up the idea of having a different past. . . . Forgiveness is giving up the idea of having a different past.

Without forgiveness we are separated from others. From a distance we tell and retell the stories of our anger: he shouldn't have said that; or she shouldn't have done that; or that should never have happened that way. We become captive to these wounds, without forgiveness we diminish our ability to grow in love. And we diminish our ability to know and appreciate others for who they really are. Through my grief, I've learned that I have to forgive myself as well. For all that time wishing things were different, wishing *they* were different, I failed to appreciate who they were, flaws and all, and simply love them for who they were. We all do that. When you're pent up in your mind and heart counting other's shortcomings, holding others to your expectations, you fail to appreciate who they really are.

And I think this was part of what David was doing in this song, avoiding the trap of bitterness. Forgiving Saul for all the things that had happened between them. And, in a way, forgiving Jonathan for all the things that would not now happen with them in the

future. David now has to face the future without both Saul and Jonathan and I'm sure it's a scary thing for him. And even though he is not mentioned in the song, I think this is where God comes in. We have mentioned in the last few weeks that these stories in Samuel are often about trust—Samuel's trust in God when he anointed David as the new king even though Saul was still on the throne, David's trust in God in the face of Goliath, --and now David's trust in God for the future. He is trusting God, trusting that God will help him make sense of his past with Jonathan and Saul, trusting also that God will guide him in the future, that God will get him through these hours of grief and will lead him into the future that God has promised.