

August 4, 2019

Lesson 10: A Covenant Between Friends

Scripture: 1 Samuel 18-20

Context:

The lesson today shifts us back to the Old Testament where the word covenant first appeared. Instead of returning to the book of Genesis where most cases of covenant appear, this lesson goes to the history of Israel and discusses covenant on a more personal level. We look to the covenant between two individuals who cared very deeply for each other.

Most of the chapters in the book of Samuel focus on David's rise to power. Throughout the narrative, one reads of David's personal intimacy with Saul's family and public approval showing that David is very much "on the rise."¹ All of Saul's family seems to have a connection with David and paved the way for David's kingship.

Chapters eighteen through twenty of first Samuel show the contrast between God's power and human will. Saul pushes back against the young man rising to power and his own grip upon the throne. Yet it becomes obvious that the protagonist is God, constantly intervening to resolve the situation.² God will have David as king and Saul's power will diminish.

Saul's son Jonathan is in the midst of all the drama. According to tradition, Jonathan should be the next king as the oldest son of his father. However, the narrative keeps pointing to the fact that such a thing will not come to be as Jonathan seeks to protect his friend.

The friendship between David and Jonathan is very much one based on loyalty and support. Jonathan is a contrast to his father Saul. Like the rest of the crowds and his sister Michal, Jonathan recognizes that David is the next king.³ Jonathan has an overall positive representation. He is seen as a heroic warrior, popular with his troops and people as a whole.⁴ His transfer of his robe is a symbolic transfer of his succession to David.⁵ He willingly gives up his crown to his friend.

Thus, we have an example of a covenant of friendship in the Bible. There are people who have bound themselves together to support one another and protect each other. It helps us see that there are covenants in addition to the intimate ones associated with erotic love. There are covenants that are based on the philos love.

¹ Walter Brueggemann, "First and Second Samuel," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 2012), 135.

² *Ibid.*, 141.

³ Michael D. Coogan, "The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures," (Oxford: University Press, 2011), 240.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 240.

Application

The covenant of friendship is a very important one today especially given the rise of studies indicating that people are lonely. Friendship can be a gift that can help people grow and feel at home in their own skin. It is a mutual sharing of woes and joys that can lead to healing and hope.

The relationship and covenant of David and Jonathan models for us what true friendship can look like in today's world. True friendship isn't just about doing activities together or being in the same Sunday school class or church. True friendship is about supporting and giving of one's self to another individual and being vulnerable and transparent.

Now for most people, there is not a need to do as Jonathan and David do with establishing a covenant with each other by giving the other person our clothes and personal items. Instead, I think we do things such as promising to hold each other's confidences and allowing our friends to name their anger, their sadness, and even the crazy things that bother them. And they do the same for us.

Yet perhaps the most satisfying part that we can give of ourselves in friendship is the pledge to support each other in whatever comes our way, for better or worse. We applaud when our friends succeed and we also mourn with our friends when they are struggling. We don't use them to get ahead and we don't manipulate them so that we benefit from their misfortunes.

The older I've gotten, the more I've come to see that good friends come by finding the people who seem to be genuinely interested in your well being whether you're winning or losing. These are people who are always there for you and make the time to be there for you. They are the people who will respond to you in the crises and if they cannot at the time, they will make time later on to be intentional about being present with you.

Another aspect of the covenant of friendship is that it doesn't follow a formula. Like David and Jonathan our friendships can cross all sorts of lines whether that is family of origin, vocational ties, or age. I have found that my deep friendships vary between people my age to people who are much older than me. Yet all the friendships are full of laughter, depth, and joy at having someone to cheer one another on. What ties them all together is the amount of support and respect that we have for one another. We take up for each other and are not afraid to share our frustrations as well as our greatest joys.

I have been blessed to have a covenant group of clergy peers and also informal friendship covenants with other clergy and lay friends. With many of them I can discuss the simple questions of figuring out how to fix something around the house to what I think about God and the universe. They are people who I can rely on in times of trouble, yet also celebrate with me in times of joy. Some of them are the ones who share my hobbies and the same interests. All of them enrich my life and help me to be a better person. Yet more importantly these relationships give me joy and help me to know that I am loved and supported. These are people who love me for me and will always have my back. And I will do the same for them.

What is important to you in a covenant of friendship? How do you discern who is a friend and who is just an acquaintance? What gifts do you bring to friendship? Where are some unexpected places you have found friendship? How do you balance old

friendships with developing new ones?

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge
PO Box 71
Brantley, AL 36009