

Sunday February 19, 2023

Lesson 12: True Friendship

Scripture: 1 Samuel 18:1-4, 19:1-7, 20; 1 John 4:7-12

Context:

Today we continue our final unit of this season with the theme, “The Practice of Spiritual Friendships.” Today’s lesson focuses on true friendship on a one-on-one basis. The scripture comes from 1 Samuel in the Old Testament and focuses on the relationship between David and Jonathan. Today’s focus will be to examine what love looks like between friends.

The book of 1 Samuel is one of the history books of the Old Testament, explaining the rise of kingship in ancient Israel. Even though God did not want the people to have a king, they continued to persist in their demands and God sent the prophet Samuel to anoint one for them. The choice of king was a handsome man by the name of Saul (see 1 Samuel 10 for his anointing and beginning reign). Although Saul was chosen by God, he fell out of favor and thus God sought a new king to govern the people of Israel.

The choice of the new king was David, also from the tribe of Benjamin. In 1 Samuel 16, we are introduced to the young man who is also anointed by Samuel. He defeats a Philistine giant by the name of Goliath and captures the attention of King Saul, who is still in power. Due to his musical ability to soothe the king, David finds a place in Saul’s court.

As David comes to the court, he is found in a new place where he quickly gains attention by multiple parties. David becomes established as popular and beloved; therefore, he is a threatening member of Saul’s court.¹ David also becomes intimately tied to the children of Saul and thus several relationships bloom.

The focus today is on Saul’s son Jonathan. Jonathan was a popular heroic figure in Israel.² At their first meeting, Jonathan and David are bound together, making a covenant with one another. The word used is one which means not only “bound,” but also suggest “conspiracy.”³ The readers will soon discover how this covenant is conspiratorial in the sense of how even angry fathers will not prevent them from fulfilling their vows to one another. The term “loved” used here refers both to an emotional attraction and a political commitment.⁴ Jonathan’s love will be to protect David, and the giving of armor solidifies as much.

As David’s popularity grows, so does Saul’s jealousy. Learning of his father’s growing anger at David, Jonathan takes great risk to himself and becomes David’s powerful advocate, even trying to prevent his father from killing David.⁵ Unfortunately, Saul reneges his promise and comes for David. Samuel and prophets surround David, and a “prophetic frenzy” overtakes

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

² See 1 Samuel 13:13- 14:46 for reference.

³ Brueggemann, *Interpretation*, 136.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 142.

the messengers who come to take him to be executed.

Application

When it comes to the term “love,” we often focus on intimate relationships. As we think of the month of February, we reflect on Valentine’s Day, a day where we celebrate love. Stores and spaces are flooded with hearts, candy, and mini cupids fluttering about. We ask the question, “Who is your valentine?”

Over time though we come to see how the romantic love, while strong and powerful, is just one example of love present. Another example of love is the love between friends, where two friends can have feelings for each other based on mutual interests, concern, or companionship. This type of love is usually centered in what the Greeks might call “philos” love, a brotherly love where you see someone as close to you, almost like they are a sibling.

When it comes to David and Jonathan, it is often hard to describe the type of love present as we do not have something along those lines valued in our culture. Their friendship love was based on covenant, where they would advocate for one another and deeply respect each other. It is interesting of how the same word “love,” is also used for David’s relationship with Michal, Jonathan’s sister who David married. This is to say the love was strong, not in a sexual sense, but in a sense where they were bound by something deep and powerful.

As it comes to this story, the greatest thing I can allude to in our modern world today is what I find in the Wesleyan tradition of a covenant group. Covenant groups are members who bind together and make a covenant to speak the truth of one’s soul and pray for one another. There is meant to be a place of transparency and trust where one can bear one’s soul without judgment or condemnation. The relationship is meant to be covered in love for the individual and there is a shared promise to be faithful to one another.

I have been very fortunate in my journey as a United Methodist Christian to be a part of several covenant groups since I entered college. Some of them were designed to last a season, and yet most of the relationships have gone beyond those times and places. These are relationships where one can be honest and tell of both dreams and hurts, disappointments and hopes, and all of it covered with love and support. They can be beautiful relationships where there is a feeling of someone loving you not just for your vocation or because you are a successful, but just for who you are as a person.

All my covenant groups have been comprised of both men and women, something which has also made me grateful as it has helped me grow in awareness of other perspectives and views. My current covenant group is also diverse in age, another added blessing as well. A member of a covenant group who is a mother and a sister can help me understand better my role as a son and brother. Someone who is older than me can help me to see sweating the small stuff doesn’t really help me. Males older than me help me to see it is okay to process feelings and express love and affection openly. The various experiences help me to grow as a person and as a Christian.

These friendships have helped me to see the power of love and how it is a gift in the world in which we live. Even as independent and autonomous as some of us would like to be, true love in friendships can root and connect us to people who help us bloom and flourish. Just as David and Jonathan had someone who promised to love and be with them, we too need such relationships to fuel our souls.

I know as I read of the story of David and Jonathan, I give thanks for the “brothers” I have in my life. These are people who laugh with me, who hold me accountable in love, and who

always support me no matter the distance. And my prayer is everyone might find the same kind of people in their lives and keep them close, seeing the power of covenant and brotherly love.

How does the story of Jonathan and David point us to power of love between friends? What kind of qualities do you look for in a spiritual friendship? Where are places you can find rich relationships which nourish your soul? How can covenant play a role in binding you to other people? Who are the Jonathan/David figures in your life?

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