

Bathsheba on that fateful day. I wish that Uriah had not died. I wish that Amnon had not raped his half-sister Tamar and Absalom had not murdered his half-brother Amnon. I wish that Absalom had not been killed as he hung in the branches of the tree and that David had not grieved. I wish that there was no family dysfunction and grief in this congregation. But there is a way to listen to the grief so that we can hear the good news. If we listen to this father grieving, we may hear another father grieving the death of a son. If we listen to this father grieving, we understand the depth of the suffering of our God for the sins of the world. If we can listen to this father grieving through the lens of the cross, then we can hear the good news, even in the midst of all the sorrows of our lives.

We don't get to choose the family in which we are raised. We don't get to choose the family dysfunction that scars us. But we do get to choose whether we will be a part of God's family.

Fred Craddock says, "When I was pastoring in Tennessee, there was a girl about seven years old who came to our church regularly for Sunday school, and sometimes her parents let her stay for the worship service. They didn't come. We had a circular drive at that church. It was built for people who let their children off and drove on. We didn't want to inconvenience them, so we had a circular drive. But they were very faithful, Mom and Dad. They had moved from New Jersey with the new chemical plant. He was upwardly mobile; they were both very ambitious; and they didn't come to church. There wasn't really any need for that, I guess.

"But on Saturday nights, the whole town knew of their parties. They gave parties, not for entertainment, but as part of the upwardly mobile thing. That determined who was invited: the right people, the one just above, and finally on up to the boss.

And those parties were full of drinking and wild vulgar things. Everybody knew. But there was their beautiful girl every Sunday.

One Sunday morning I looked out, and she was there. I thought, "Well, she's with her friends," but it was her Mom and Dad. After the sermon, at the close of the service, as is the custom at my church, came an invitation to discipleship, and Mr. and Mrs. Mom and Dad came to the front. They confessed faith in Christ. Afterward, I asked, "What prompted this?"

They said, "Well, do you know about our parties?"

And I said, "Yeah, I have heard about your parties."

They said, "Well, we had one last night again, and it got a little loud, it got a little rough, and there was too much drinking. We waked our daughter, and she came downstairs to about the third step. She saw that we were eating and drinking, and said, 'Oh, can I say the blessing? God is great, God is good, let us thank him for our food. Good-night, everybody.' She went back upstairs. 'Oh, my land, it's time to go, we've got to be going.' 'We've stayed way too long.' Within two minutes, the room was empty."

Mr. and Mrs. Mom and Dad began cleaning up, picking up crumpled napkins and wasted and spilled peanuts and half-sandwiches, and taking empty glasses and trays to the kitchen. And with two trays, he and she met on either side of the sink, they looked at each other, and he expressed what both were thinking. "Where do we think we are going?"

If you listen this morning, you will hear the grief of a father. But if you listen beyond and through the grief, you will hear the good news, inviting you into the family of God.

¹ Tony Cartledge, *Smyth & Helwys*, "1 & 2 Samuel," p. 606.


FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
Let Us Share First With You.



August 13, 2006
Tenth Sunday of Kingdomtide

Listening Through
the Grief
2 Samuel 18:5-9, 31-33

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“O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you O Absalom, my son, my son.”

Nathan had prophesied that David would not die for his dirty deed with Bathsheba and Uriah. Is there a penalty that is worse than death?

“Would *I had died* instead of you O Absalom, my son, my son.”

If David had known the events that would unfold, the deconstruction of his family, the devastation of the things that he most cherished, he would have gladly chosen death.

“O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!”

“You shall not die,” Nathan had prophesied, “(but) the sword shall never depart from your house.” “I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house,” the prophet said.

“O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!”

Is there in all of Scripture, a more profound expression of grief than this?

Listen to this father grieving the tragic loss of his son. Listen to this father grieving the dissolution of his family. Listen to this father grieving the failures and mistakes of his past. Listen to this father and all who are grieving today.

Mr. Miller has lived alone since his wife died thirteen years ago. He has not heard from his three grown children in more than five years. In his loneliness, he sometimes wonders where he failed them and he grieves.

Tim has moved back home with his parents. He has been out of work for over a year and has exhausted his savings. He did not want to move back home, nor did his parents, but he has no place else to turn and he grieves.

Dorothy is looking for work to support her three children now that her husband, Dan, has left her for a

younger woman. She never imagined that she would be at this place in her life and she grieves.

Meredith sits in the back of the classroom knowing that the other girls are talking about her. She tried all summer to lose weight, but she only got bigger. She has given up hope of ever being normal, much less popular, and she grieves.

Listen to the grief this morning. David’s sad lament gives voice to the many griefs that resonate in our lives. Listen to the grief this morning and, in listening, hear the good news.

Today, I am concluding our summer sermon series on the life of David. We have followed David’s ascent from unknown shepherd boy to unrivaled king and we have now followed David’s descent into adultery, murder, and despair. The lectionary has chosen to end the David cycle with this tragic ending and David’s sad lament. In his commentary on this text, Tony Cartledge asks, “What are we to do with this difficult text? How do we hear the Word of God in this story of battle and blood and decisions good and bad?”¹

This text is difficult because it covers a lot of material. This text is difficult because it is such a sad story of loss. But the text invites us to hear the good news even in the midst of sorrow and despair.

In our study of David last week, the prophet Nathan had confronted him with the unwelcomed and unwanted news that his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah had been found out. David would not die, Nathan said, but he would live with the consequences of his actions.

When we come to this text today, a lot has happened since Nathan gave those words. We can now see the events that Nathan was predicting. The child of David and Bathsheba’s tragic affair died, but Bathsheba bore another son to David

whose name was Solomon. Amnon, David’s first-born and heir to the throne, raped his half-sister, Tamar. David’s second son, Absalom, murdered his half-brother Amnon for this rape of his sister, Tamar. Absalom spent some time in exile, but eventually was brought home and restored to favor. Even though Absalom was in line for the throne, his pride and hubris were so great that he rebelled against his own father and seized the throne.

In the midst of this family drama, David, a man of decisive action in politics and war, was totally inept, inactive and impotent when it came to dealing with his own family.

Family systems theory teaches that we can never understand the actions or needs of an individual without looking at the whole family. Family systems theory teaches that the family is the total ecology of our lives that shapes and directs us. Family systems theory teaches that we are products of our families.

Absalom was a tragic figure. He was handsome, charismatic, courageous, and capable. He would have been a great king. But he was a product of this dysfunctional family. Living in this family, he had a skewed idea of power. Living in this family, he had learned that you simply take what you want. Living in this family, he had learned that sometimes you can get away with murder. If only David had intervened earlier.

Perhaps David saw something in Absalom that reminded him of his young self:

- the rebel leader, fighting the armies of Saul;
- the handsome warrior;
- the man who would be king.

For whatever reason, David could not discipline the boy and the result was tragic. “O Absalom, my son, my son.”

I wish that David had never seen