

Amazing Grace

Lent Worship Series

Ash Wednesday: David

Sermon

- The **Sermon**, “Grace for the Humble,” is delivered by the pastor (P) as narrator and another reader (R) as David, who perhaps is wearing a shepherd’s robe:

P As ashes are placed upon our forehead, we hear the words, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” As it was for Adam, so also for us, it is a reminder of our mortality and death. But it is also a call to humility, to our connection to the very dust of the ground from which we were created. And in the shape of the cross, it is a promise that even in the midst of humble death, there is the promise that our Lord Jesus the Christ is with us.

Throughout Lent and Holy Week, we will hear the stories of several biblical figures whose lives were transformed by God’s amazing grace. We begin this Ash Wednesday with the story of a humble representative of our humanity: God’s servant, David.

R I was the youngest son of my father, Jesse.

P As the youngest son of Jesse, and with his family roots in the town of Bethlehem, David had humble beginnings. All that David had, and all that he would be, was a credit to the grace of God. David, in all humility, knew this to be true. And his own early life in Bethlehem reminds us of Jesus, who was born in a manger in the town of Bethlehem. Jesus was a man of great

humility throughout life. But through his humility, we all have come to experience the fullness of God's grace that raises up the weak and the lowly.

R "You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."

P When Saul, the king of Israel, had fallen out of favor with the Lord, God sent Samuel to look for a new king among Jesse's sons. Samuel examined the brothers of David first, but none were found to be those selected by the Lord. For the Lord said to Samuel, "The Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." There was only one other son of Jesse, David, who was out tending the flocks. Samuel called for David, and the Lord said to the prophet, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." So in the presence of all of his older brothers, David was anointed to be the next king of Israel. And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David.

R "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

P As David was also a shepherd, he nonetheless called the Lord his shepherd. So our Lord Jesus was the Good Shepherd, who cares for the whole flock of humanity. As David would be anointed, so would our Lord be anointed. "Christ" means "the anointed one"—and Jesus would be anointed to bring us God's grace. And as the Spirit of God settled upon David, so the Spirit of God would settle upon Jesus as the ambassador of God's grace. At Jesus' baptism, God's voice proclaimed from the heavens, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Jesus would then take up the mission of bringing the good news to one and all. Through him, we all receive the grace of being called God's own children in the Spirit of God's love.

R "The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul."

P Saul would first learn of David as a man skilled in the playing of the lyre. He sent for him, hoping that his music would bring him relief from his deeply troubled and tormented spirit. And so David, through his music, brought comfort to Saul's spirit.

But even as Saul would bestow favor upon David, it was David who would grow in God's favor. Saul did not know that David was anointed to be his successor. Yet Saul noticed the courage of David. So when the Philistine Goliath taunted the army of Israel, leading them to cower in fear, David was up to the challenge of taking on this giant of a man with just a sling and five small stones.

R "The Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands."

P Goliath would fall to the hand of David. And Saul would then bless David all the more. He would have David lead his armies against the foes of Israel, and David would become a mighty warrior, graced with much success in his campaigns. David would also become friends with Saul's own son, Jonathan. And when they came home in victory, the people would chant, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Yet this would only incur the jealousy and wrath of Saul. David became a fugitive as his life was threatened by Saul.

R *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."*

P The Lord's grace was upon his humble servant, David. God protected David, and provided bread for him and his company. And David lived in that grace. As David was cared for by God, so David cared for the life of his chief adversary, King Saul, even when he had opportunity to take Saul's life. David knew that God's grace is greater than all animosity and hatred for one's enemies.

R *"You lead me in right paths for your name's sake.... You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies."*

P But Saul would fall in battle nonetheless, at the hands of the Philistines. So also would David's dearest friend, Jonathan. David would be deeply grieved, and he would cry out for them in deep lament.

R *"How the mighty have fallen!"*

P But even in death, the Good Shepherd is with us. Mourning gives way to the grace of God's everlasting presence. And as David had been so blessed in his journeys in life, so he also bestowed blessings to those who were with him in this moment of grief at the death of Saul and his sons.

R *"Now may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you!"*

P The time of Saul's reign was over. David's time to rule was just beginning. By God's grace, he would be acclaimed the king of Judah, and soon all of Israel as well. The city of Jerusalem would become the capital of this kingdom.

David would then bring the ark of the covenant into the holy city. He danced before the ark, to the sounds of music and great festivity. But he also lamented that the ark itself had no home or great cedar halls as David himself did as king. So David gave thought to building a house for God, a magnificent temple for the Lord.

But in spite of David's magnanimous offer, the Lord had something more gracious in mind instead for David. He sent the prophet Nathan to remind David of God's embrace of humble-

ness, and his amazing grace for David. “Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: You shall not build me a house to live in. For I have not lived in a house since the day I brought out Israel to this very day, but I have lived in a tent and a tabernacle... Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went.... I will make for you a name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.”

Humbled by God’s great gift of an everlasting covenant, David prayed to the Lord.

R “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house that you have brought me thus far?... Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have wrought all this greatness, so that your servant may know it. Therefore you are great, O Lord God; for there is no one like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears.”

P As David got older, he would let others lead his armies and fight battles against the enemies of Israel. He would take his rest in those days. But it was also then that David committed his most grievous sin. Walking upon the rooftop of his house in the late hours of the day, David spied a young and very beautiful woman bathing in the courtyard below. Her name was Bathsheba, and she was the wife of Uriah. He sent for her, and laid with her; and she conceived a child.

Uriah was one of David’s officers. David called him from the battle back to Jerusalem. He tried to coax Uriah to go home, to spend the night with his wife, thinking this child might then be passed off as Uriah’s own. But Uriah was a disciplined man, unwilling to go to his own home while his fellow warriors spent their nights in the open field. So David conceived a more devious plan. In order to cover his own sins of lust and adultery, David had Uriah carry the orders to place Uriah himself in the front lines of battle. Uriah was murdered. David then brought Bathsheba into his own home as his own wife.

It was then that the prophet Nathan came to David. Nathan told the king about a poor man in the kingdom who had only one little lamb. But a rich man, wanting to throw a feast for a guest, instead of taking a sheep from his own flock, took the poor man’s lamb instead. David was livid to hear of this injustice.

R “The man who did this deserves to die!”

P Nathan said to him, “You are the man!” And he proceeded to tell David how he had sinfully slept with Bathsheba and had her husband killed, all in order to take her as his own spouse in his kingdom, despite the many blessings God had already bestowed upon David. Now David’s sin was exposed before his own eyes, as well as the eyes of God.

R *“I have sinned against the Lord!”*

P Any successes David may have had in life are now laid barren in the truth of his sinfulness. Yet David humbled himself before the Lord, and repented.

R *“Have mercy on me, O God, according to you steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions.... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me.”*

P The Scriptures tells us that Jesus was David’s son, but he was also David’s Lord. While descended from the line of David, Jesus’ own death upon the cross was for the sins of David. Indeed, Jesus the Christ came to redeem us all from the depth of our sinfulness. Listening to David’s story, we hear firsthand that he was not a perfect man by any means. He sinned. He sinned greatly. And he knew the deep darkness of his sin. Yet in humility, he confessed his sins; and even in his sorrow and remorse, he found the deep and abiding grace of God’s forgiving mercy.

R *“The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior.”*

P David knew that God’s steadfast love was not something he deserved. It was a gift of God’s grace toward him. And that grace comes through in all of David’s psalms. Even as God continued to grace David with steadfast love, so God also continues to grace us with steadfast love.

R *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.”*

P Even though there would be hard consequences for David to bear because of his sin, he trusted the gracious healing of the Lord. And God would, indeed, heal David’s life. Bathsheba would bear David a son who would become his successor. This son was named Solomon, a name that means “peace.” It is a reminder of where all our sorrows end, in the peace of God. But Solomon was not the only son of David who would bring peace. Jesus our Lord, the Son of David, would bring “peace” to us all through his good news.

R *“The Lord was my stay. He brought me out into a broad place; he delivered, because he delighted in me.... Indeed, you are my lamp, O Lord. The Lord lightens my darkness.”*

P The darkness of death would come upon David himself. David reigned over Israel for forty years. Yet in all those years, as throughout his life, the amazing grace of God was with him.

And the amazing grace that David experienced in many ways follows our own experience this

Lent. We ponder the grace of love through the cross of Christ for our salvation. Lent is a time for us, like David, to examine our lives. It means taking a good hard look at our lives, even the myriad of sins we have committed. But it means also to grasp in humble faith all the more boldly and firmly the amazing grace we have received and experienced in Jesus, the Christ, the son of David, and David's Lord, who blots out all our transgressions and creates in each one of us a clean heart that we might live a new life blessed by him. In humility, we hear the words of this day, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." But amazing grace through Jesus the Christ comes to the humble of heart!