

### *Hidden in Plain Sight*

**Psalm 46:1-3, 9-11** God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. <sup>2</sup>Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; <sup>3</sup>though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. <sup>9</sup>He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. <sup>10</sup>"Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth." <sup>11</sup>The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

**Romans 8:31-39** What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? <sup>33</sup>Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup>Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." <sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

### *Hidden in Plain Sight*

Last week we looked at what a scoundrel David was at times. We're not talking about mischievous misbehavior. No, David used his position as king to impose his lust on a woman. He committed adultery. With cunning he plotted to cover up his actions. And when that didn't work, he abused his authority as king in a clever plot to have Bathsheba's husband killed in battle. David was remorseless, relentless, and did whatever it took to satisfy his own desires with no thought to the feelings of others. And yet, we're told that David was a man after God's own heart. How do we reconcile all of this?

It isn't enough to just point out that David was created in the image of God. That's true of all of us - every one of us. The unique statement that David was a man after God's own heart is made in the context of God's displeasure with King Saul. Saul, the first king of the loose confederation of the tribes of Israel had displeased God. God sent the prophet Samuel to anoint a new king, a man after God's own heart. It's obvious that, in God's opinion, there's a critical difference between the character of Saul and the character of David. The scriptures never tell us specifically what this difference is, nor what about David made him so aligned with God's heart.

But there are some clues that we might examine. Saul seems to have lost sight of God. He seems to consistently make his decisions as king without any consideration of what God's will might be. Saul was intensely afraid of any potential threat to his throne. On several occasions he wanted to kill David because he was jealous of David's popularity with the people, jealous of David's success in battle, and generally felt threatened by David's abilities. Rather than celebrating David's gifts as a loyal subject, Saul felt threatened by David's talent.

Saul never knew that David had been anointed to be the next king. David never told anyone, nor acted presumptuously. David served his king faithfully. He never tried to depose Saul from the throne. Instead, he treated Saul with respect and tried to reassure Saul that he wasn't a threat to him. On two occasions, David had a clear opportunity to kill King Saul and take the throne. In the twenty-fourth chapter of First Samuel, we're told how Saul set out with 3000 men to hunt down David. David and his small group of men were hiding in the back recesses of a cave. King Saul came into that cave to use it as a restroom. As he squatted there, David's men whispered encouragement to David to go capture or

kill him. David snuck up quietly and cut off a piece of Saul's cloak. When Saul left, David came out of the cave and yelled at Saul. He waved the piece of cloth at Saul as proof that he meant Saul no harm. Saul yelled back, "You are more righteous than I; for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. <sup>19</sup> For who has ever found an enemy, and sent the enemy safely away? So may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day." (1 Samuel 24:17,19 NRS)

Two chapters later, Saul has gotten over his good attitude toward David, and he again set out with three thousand men to track David down. As Saul and his men slept one night, David crept into camp and took Saul's spear and the jug of water by his head. Then at a safe distance, he called and woke up the camp, showing Saul the spear and pitcher to prove that he could have killed him as he slept.

David had compassion for his enemy Saul. Even though David was anointed to be the next king, he never sought to dethrone King Saul, trusting that his time as king would come in God's own time. Still, we're left with significant acts of both good and evil by David, and we wonder why God looked so favorably on him.

We can ask the same question about many of the important people in the Bible. Moses killed a man in Egypt and ran away to Moab. But there, God told Moses to return to Egypt, confront Pharaoh, and lead the Hebrew people out of slavery. Moses argued with God. Actually, on more than one occasion, Moses questioned God's wisdom, argued, pleaded, and was otherwise non-compliant in his relationship with God. We'd expect the creator of the universe to smite Moses and go get someone who was less trouble and more agreeable.

On the night when Jesus faced a kangaroo court, on the night when Jesus needed a friend the most, Peter swore up and down that he had no idea who Jesus was. It's a wonder that lightning didn't strike Peter and turn him into a pillar of charcoal. And the man who we know as the apostle Paul first appears as the devout fanatic Saul, who in his religious fervor set off to persecute and prosecute those who were disciples of Jesus. Again, a mighty smiting seems to be in order. But that didn't happen.

How can we explain this? Perhaps the answer is hidden in plain sight. Or, as my Dad would put it, "If it had been a snake, it would have bit you!" One more story of an important biblical character may help. Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, was, like David, a cunning trickster. He took advantage of his older brother's impetuous nature to get him to sign over his rights as the first born. Then, as Jacob's father lay on his deathbed, Jacob tricked his father into giving him the blessing intended for his older brother. Nice guy Jacob! But Jacob didn't get the punishment he deserved.

Some years later, faced with meeting his older brother whom he had cheated twice, Jacob was apprehensive, to say the least. The night before they were to meet, Jacob had a dream. <sup>12</sup> . . . he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. <sup>13</sup> And the LORD stood beside him and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; <sup>14</sup> and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. <sup>15</sup> Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."<sup>16</sup> Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place-- and I did not know it!" (Genesis 28:16-16)

Jacob wasn't punished, as he so richly deserved. Rather, God promised to bless him and his descendants. And Jacob suddenly realized a great truth. "Surely the LORD is in this place-- and I did not know it!" God's love, God's never ending love, God's compassion, and God's forgiveness was in that place, that place where Jacob was. It surrounded him. It enveloped him. And he hadn't known it. If it had been a snake it would have bit him. But it wasn't a snake; it was God's love – hidden in plain sight.

Sam Marshall, the General Presbyter of Salem Presbytery, tells a story. All over the country high school marching bands compete for recognition and honors. Just as the football teams compete for

increasing levels of championship, so do the bands. The bands come together at a designated stadium. The judges go up to the press box at the top of the grandstand where they have the best view of how well each band marches with precision and alignment. Seated in the grandstand below the press box are the parents who have come to support and encourage their kids. Each band in turn takes the field and does their best to perform as well as they can. They've practiced for months for this very moment. At some point in their routine they usually march away from the grandstand – and then they do an about face – and play their loudest and best toward the press box, seeking to impress the judges who sit there with scorecards before them. We tend to think of God as that judge up high in the press box, pencil poised to note our mistakes and grade us down accordingly. But we're wrong. God our Father, God who spreads her wings over us like a mother hen, is like the parent in the grandstand, encouraging us, supporting us, cheering us on to do our best.

God's love, God's compassion, God's forgiveness is hidden in plain sight. It's always there. We're the ones who are blind to it. Jacob, Moses, Peter, Paul, and David are all heroes of the faith. They all were deeply flawed and those flaws erupted when God was hidden in plain sight. God wasn't hiding from them. Instead, they had closed their eyes to God's presence. Surely God was with them and God is with each one of us, offering encouragement and cheering us on. We're the ones who close our eyes to that steadfast love.

These days, the Olympics are on our minds and on our TV screens. A sports metaphor seems especially apt this morning. Harold Kushner said, "Life is not a trap set for us by God, so that he can condemn us for failing. Life is not a spelling bee, where no matter how many words you have gotten right, if you make one mistake you are disqualified. Life is more like a baseball season, where even the best team loses one-third of its games and even the worst team has its days of brilliance. Our goal is not to go all year without ever losing a game. Our goal is to win more than we lose, and if we can do that consistently enough, then when the end comes, we will have won it **all**."<sup>1</sup>

Don't hide God in plain sight. Instead, live with the constant knowledge of God's love and encouragement. God's love goes ahead of you, God's presence is beside you, and God's forgiveness has your back, as you live as a disciple, doing God's work wherever you are. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Harold S. Kushner, *How Good Do We Have To Be?* (Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1996) p 180-181