

July 5, 2015 – David Laments

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27

The story of the David and Saul and Jonathan is a story of love and grief, joy and suffering.

It seems strange to be talking of grief when we have just celebrated four baptisms. But such is life. As a minister, I often find myself moving from a funeral to a baptism or a wedding on the same weekend or the same day. Today we celebrate new beginnings in our congregation, reflect on one of the great love stories in the Bible and acknowledge the pain of grief.

When David heard that Saul and Jonathan were dead he took out his lyre and he wrote the *Song of the Bow* a stunning tribute to both his mentor and his best friend.

I expect all of us here have felt the pain and the anguish of grief. Wouldn't it be amazing if we all had the ability to write songs in remembrance of those we have lost? But most of us don't have that particular gift and so we express our grief and pay tribute to our loved ones in other ways: we have a funeral or a memorial service, we give flowers, we prepare eulogies, we cry, we laugh and we tell stories.

During the first few days of loss the ones most deeply affected are often numb with the shock. Obviously David's numbness was very short-lived. His expression of grief was both quick and dramatic. The scriptures tell us that "David took hold of his clothes and tore them: and all the men who were with him did the same. They mourned and wept, and fasted until evening" (2 Samuel 1:11). This was a very healthy reaction to a huge loss in their lives. They mourned not only Saul and his sons, but also the other Israelite soldiers who had died in battle.

Once we allow the emotions to flow then the ones that come to the surface are not only grief; but sometimes: guilt, remorse, anger, resentment, despair, anxiety, depression, and loneliness. Often our anger is so strong that we blame the blameless. How many of us in a time of grief have lashed out at a family member or even a stranger. David went so far as to curse the mountain where Saul and Jonathan died, he sang, "let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor bounteous fields" (2 Samuel 1:21).

During these initial stages of grief our prayers may be more like a lament, a crying to God from a place of darkness, a calling to God from a place of pain, a pleading with God for comfort. David's song was both a tribute and a lament. He praised both Saul and Jonathan and also expressed his anger and his pain.

David's relationship with Saul had been a complicated one. At first, Saul had been David's beloved mentor, his guide and then as David's fame grew Saul's

paranoia took over and he tried to have David killed. With Saul's death, David was no longer a hunted man. In fact, the primary obstacle between him and the throne of Israel had been removed. David actually had reason to rejoice, but instead he sang a song of lament.

Some theologians argue that David's grief for Saul may have been more political than personal; that his outward mourning may have been for show. But I expect what David felt was true grief. Like many of you, I know what it is to be estranged from a close family member. Like David, I had good reason to separate myself from that person. But when that person died my feelings were many. I was relieved, I was angry, I was resentful; but most of all I needed to grieve. Despite our estrangement, there was still love and there was still a great sense of loss. In fact the sense of loss may have been even larger than normal: I mourned not only this person's death, but also the relationship that we were never able to have. I know it is possible to deeply grieve the loss of those who have harmed us. When David sang, "Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely" (2 Samuel 1:23), I believe he was being sincere.

The level of grief that we feel is directly proportional to the connection that we had with the person who has died. Jonathan was David's best friend. When they first met, the Bible tells us that, "the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18:1). When Saul tried to have David killed, Jonathan was instrumental in saving David's life. Jonathan went against his own father in order save his friend.

Their connection was so deep that some scholars even argue that they were lovers. It's impossible to prove that they had a physical relationship. But it is obvious that David loved Jonathan very deeply. In his song he wrote, "I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan: greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (1 Samuel 1:26).

When the pain of loss is so great, we may sometimes ask ourselves, is it worth it? Parker Palmer, a Quaker, a teacher of teachers, spoke the following words at a recent graduation ceremony at Naropa University:

I'm 76 years old, I now know many people who've suffered the loss of the dearest person in their lives. At first they go into deep grief, certain that their lives will never again be worth living. But then they slowly awaken to the fact that not in spite of their loss, but because of it, they've become bigger, more compassionate people, with more capacity of heart to take in other people's sorrows and joys. These are broken-hearted people, but their hearts have been broken open, rather than broken apart. So every day exercise your heart, by taking in life's little pains and joys. That kind of exercise will make your heart supple, the way a runner makes a muscle supple, so that when it breaks, (and it surely will,) it will break not into a fragment grenade, but into a greater capacity for love.

<http://www.couragerenewal.org/living-from-the-inside-out-parker-palmer-naropa-university-commencement-address>

David allowed himself to love deeply and therefore the loss that he felt was also great. The pain of grief is the shadow side of deep love. And the source of all love is God. I believe Dostoyevsky was stating truth when he wrote:

‘The darker the night, the brighter the stars.

The deeper the grief, the closer is God.”

May we all love so deeply that we know the presence of God in both our joy and our sorrow.