

“Like Refugees at the King’s Table!”

July 25, 2010

2 Samuel 9:1-13

Psalm 116:5-7

**A Sermon preached by
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Now, I’ve got to be honest with you. Sometimes when we have communion here at church, I look at myself and I think I see a man named Mephibosheth. **MEPHIBOSHETH** of all people! The question, of course, is **WHO** is **MEPHIBOSHETH**? Let me see the hands of all of you out there who remember who Mephibosheth is? Come on! I’ve told you about Mephibosheth before! Surely more of you than **THAT** remember Mephibosheth!

Well, never mind! Unless you’ve read ahead in the story of David...and paid close attention to what you’ve read...you probably **WOULDN’T** remember who Mephibosheth is. He simply **ISN’T** a major player in the grand scheme of things. And yet, I’ve got to tell you again that sometimes, on the Sundays when we have communion, I look in the mirror of this sacrament and the face I see looking back at me is the face of Mephibosheth. And the frame of the mirror in which I see Mephibosheth’s image is a frame called **GRACE**. Let me explain what I mean.

Now, like I said, the story of Mephibosheth is simply **NOT** a particularly familiar one...even though I have shared it with you before. But it is a fascinating story none-the-less...precisely because it is a story of grace and mercy at the table of the King. And **AS SUCH**, it is a parable of God’s gracious welcome of us, you and me, at the table of **OUR** king, Christ Jesus, our Lord. So here’s the story!

Mephibosheth, you see, came from quite a remarkable family. At the time of his birth, his future seemed assured and exceedingly bright. His grandfather, after all, was Saul, the first king of Israel. Saul, you will remember, was “tall, dark and handsome” as the expression goes. He stood head and shoulders above everybody else, both literally and figuratively. And at the beginning of his reign, he was an effective leader and a great general. Saul’s eldest son was Jonathan, who was destined to become the king of Israel after his father...**UNTIL**, that is, the Lord chose **DAVID** to succeed Saul because Saul disobeyed the Lord.

Now, you would have **THOUGHT** that because God chose **DAVID** to become king after Saul, that Jonathan, the rightful heir to the throne as Saul’s eldest, would have been bitter and resentful toward David. I mean, if **YOU** had been bumped out of the line of succession to become king by some complete and total stranger...by some shepherd boy from some little out of the way hick town called Bethlehem...wouldn’t **YOU** have been a little miffed? But not so Jonathan! Instead, Jonathan became David’s best friend, and even protected and sheltered David when Saul, in his fits of jealous rage, tried to kill David.

Well, all of this is leading up to the fact that Mephibosheth was Jonathan’s son...and Saul’s grandson. Which is to say that Mephibosheth was undoubtedly born into privilege, position and power.

But then, suddenly...violently...everything changed. His father and grandfather went off to once again battle Israel’s most hated and dreaded enemy...the Philistine. And, as you will remember from last week, the Israelites were badly defeated. In fact, they were pulverized in battle. And in the process, both the father and the grandfather of young Mephibosheth – King Saul and Prince Jonathan, along with Saul’s other sons, were all killed in battle, as the Philistines moved in to take over the land of Israel.

Suddenly the royal palace, which up until then had been a haven of safety and security for young Mephibosheth, now became a place of confusion and chaos. The entire royal family...the king and all of his possible successors, with the lone exception of Saul’s grandson, Mephibosheth, had been wiped out. And who knows who would try to kill **HIM** next. So plans were quickly made to spirit him away to safety.

Well, in the terror and confusion of retreat as the Philistines advanced, a faithful royal servant grabbed the young, five year old Mephibosheth and fled. But as they ran from the palace, however, the servant dropped the little boy and severely injured his legs. (2 Sam. 4:4) Oh, perhaps if he had received immediately medical attention...or had had modern-day orthopedic surgery available...his condition wouldn’t have been so debilitating. But under the circumstances, the boy became permanently lame in both legs...crippled for life.

And so it was that overnight the boy who had been a prince became a refugee in exile...and a child who had been able to walk and jump and leap and run became a cripple. And meanwhile, David...who was a man after God's own heart...God's chosen one...became king over all of Israel, bringing Israel greater power and glory than it had ever known. (2 Samuel 1-8).

But then, one day, King David made an inquiry. *"Is there anyone left from the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan's sake?"* (2 Sam. 9:1) David and Jonathan, you will remember, were the best of friends. And you will also remember that after David spared Saul's life and Saul finally recognized that David would be the next king of Israel, Saul asked David to look kindly on his descendants, *"that they may live forever in the land of Israel"*...which David promised he would do. (1 Sam. 24:21-22)

Well, when David learned that Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, was still alive, a refugee hiding in exile, he sent for him. And when the young man was brought to David, he came fearfully, thinking that the King would surely kill him so that none of Saul's descendants could ever again challenge David for the throne. After all, that's the way things were done in the world of power politics from David's day until today. Wipe out anyone who might be able to challenge your power and you have ABSOLUTE POWER.

But David said to Mephibosheth:

Do not be afraid, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father, Jonathan.

I will give you back all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul,

and you will always be welcomed at my table. (2 Sam. 9:7)

And then the scriptures tell us:

So Mephibosheth ate at the king's table, just like one of the king's sons.

And Mephibosheth, who was crippled in both feet, lived in Jerusalem,

eating all of his meals at the king's table. (2 Sam. 9:13)

Now, as I said earlier, Mephibosheth's story is kind of like a PARABLE to me...the climax of which comes when we gather at the Table of our Lord. You see, Mephibosheth was born well...born into a royal family. And so are WE...well-born children of our heavenly Father. In fact, when human beings came to birth, the morning stars sang together as the whole universe rejoiced at such a grand climax to God's good creation. *"Who are we humans that you think of us...mere humans that you care for us?"* David himself wrote. *"Yet you have made us inferior only to yourself. You crown us with glory and honor. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"* (Psalm 8)

But somewhere along the way, like Mephibosheth, we suffered a fall. We stumbled. We lost our footing. We injured ourselves and became crippled. For Mephibosheth, it was simply the crippling of his feet when he was dropped by his nurse who was running to escape the enemy. But for us, however, it was the crippling of our hearts...our souls...our very lives. Plain and simple, we stumbled over sin and became broken. Separated from the king and his table, like Mephibosheth, we also live our lives in exile and hiding...

UNTIL, that is, one day we hear the Good News! For Mephibosheth, it came in the form of king's question: *"Is there anyone left from Saul's family that I may be kind to him for Jonathan's sake?"* For us, it comes in the invitation of our Lord: *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to my table will never be hungry...and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty!"* (Jn. 6:35) *So COME to me ALL of you who are crippled...or broken...or burdened...or weighed down. And I will give you comfort...and strength...and rest...and hope...and grace and mercy and peace!* (Mt. 11:28)

In both instances WE are sought out. Mephibosheth was sought out by King David...NOT because of anything wonderful Mephibosheth had done to deserve the king's special favor...but because DAVID was gracious and kind and WANTED to show mercy to Jonathan's family. And WE are sought out NOT because of our deserving either...but because of the graciousness of OUR king who, because of HIS grace and mercy and love, invites even the likes of crippled people like US to join him at his table. And THAT, good friends and lovers of God, is what AMAZING GRACE is all about!

Oftentimes, when I come to the communion table, I look at myself and I see this man named Mephibosheth. Like Mephibosheth, I'm not whole either. Like Mephibosheth, I'm broken and crippled. And like Mephibosheth, I come to the table from my hiding place in exile...as a refugee. Mephibosheth, of course, came to the king's table on broken feet. I come to the king's table with a broken life.

And yet, like Mephibosheth, I'm WELCOMED at the king's table none-the-less...NOT because I somehow DESERVE to be there...NOT because I'm pretty or perfect or whole...but because I've been INVITED to come...as Mephibosheth was invited to come...by the grace and mercy...the goodness and love of the one who invites me. Like Mephibosheth, I've been ACCEPTED into the king's family and am WELCOMED to dine at the king's table. And so are you...and so are YOU!

In grace and in mercy, David welcome Mephibosheth for Jonathan's sake. And in grace and mercy, God welcomes US for Christ's sake. And THAT, good friends and lovers of God, is once again what AMAZING GRACE is all about!

To be sure, we are ALL refugees at the King's table! None of us DESERVE to be here. But we are here at the King's gracious invitation – accepted and loved – by the one at whose table we are ALWAYS welcomed!

Amazing Grace, how SWEET the sound!

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