

BIBLE CHARACTERS MEPHIBOSHETH
Broken and Blessed
II Samuel 9.1-13

Doug Anderson has told this story taken from a Dennis the Menace cartoon strip.

First we see Dennis and Joey “hassling” Mr. Wilson.
 Or maybe it is the other way around.

Anyway, Mrs. Wilson appears by Mr. Wilson’s side.
 She has a plate of cookies, a heaping full plate of cookies.
 You can almost smell them as you see the lines of aroma coming from the cookies.
 Mrs. Wilson asks, “Would you boys like some cookies?”

Then we see Dennis and Joey are walking away.
 Their mouths are full of cookies,
 their hands are full of cookies,
 and pockets are full of cookies.
 In between bites Joey says to Dennis,
 “We sure must be good for Mrs. Wilson to give us all these cookies.”

Dennis says, “It’s not because we’re good Joey.
 It’s because Mrs. Wilson is good.”

Dennis gets it right, doesn’t he?
 It is Mrs. Wilson who is good.

We, like Joey often get it turned around.
 We think that we simply deserve God’s love
 or that we can do something to earn God’s love.

Well, we can’t earn nor do we necessarily deserve God’s love.
 God’s love for you and I was there at the beginning of time,
 is there for us now,
 and will be there for us until the end of time
 despite of what we say or do.

In fact Paul tells us God’s love is there for us despite what we say or do,
 Romans 5.8, ***“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this;
 While we were still sinner; Christ died for us.”***

The “churchy” term for that love is grace.
 Grace extraordinaire is found in the story of David and Mephibosheth.

We pick up their story just after David had come home from the battlefield.
 Israel is 10 times as large as a result of David’s conquest.
 There is a peace on all fronts.

David is ready to attend to domestic affairs,

“to do what was just and right for all the people.”

He appointed priests to reestablish right worship.
He appointed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to oversee any military operations.
And his sons assumed their positions as royal David’s advisors.

The Bible tells us the Ark of the Covenant is safely home
and the people celebrated the ark’s return.
None were as passionate as David, he danced naked before the ark.
That was a bit too passionate as far as one of his wives was concerned.

So perhaps for David there is a time for some r and r, some rest and relaxation,
or maybe some time for refecton and recollection.

As a shepherd David would learn to be no stranger to solitude.
He spent many days and many nights gazing into the sky
in awe of the sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,
in wonder of his station and status in life.

He had asked and maybe even found some answers
to some of those soul searching questions of life.

He shares some of the questions and answers, thoughts and feelings in the psalms.

Now as he thinks about how he ended up where he is today
David would certainly understand that God had something to do with it.
Actually he knows God had everything to do with it.

But he might be thinking about the people involved,
Who helped? Who hindered?
Who was a friend? Who were the foes?

And Jonathan and Saul would obviously come to mind
and with them a couple of promises he made to them.

The first promise we find in I Samuel 20.14 and following,
David’s friend Jonathan is talking,
*“But show me unfailing kindness like that of the Lord as long as I live
so that I may not be killed, (whether I make it though this alive or not)
do not ever cut off your kindness from my family...”*

**then in verse 17 it says, “And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him,
because he loved him as he loved himself.”**

(He loved David more than life, more than his own soul.)

Let’s not move too quickly past the word kindness.
We probably can’t feel the passion or intensity in the word kindness.
It feels too bland, too feeble.
Kindness in the Bible is not just being kind, not just being nice.
Acts of kindness pack power and punch.
Kindness is the word we’re going to use for grace today, God’s grace.

God's grace that can and does change lives.

After King Saul, Jonathan's father acknowledges David has spared his life he calls upon David to make him a promise, in I Samuel 24.20+ he says,

***"I know that you will surely be king of Israel
and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands.***

(Saul could read the writing on the wall)

***Now swear to me by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants
or wipe out my name from my father's descendants."*** (Pretty much what Jonathan asked for)
The result ***"So David gave his oath to Saul."***

Maybe the Spirit is speaking to some of us about keeping our promises.

How many of you are good at keeping your promises?

Keeping your promises no matter what.

Promises to one another? Your kids? Your spouse?

Your boss? your employees? Your church? God? Even yourself?

Promises about who and when, what and where, time and place.

David was determined to keep his promise in gratitude to friend and kindred spirit Jonathan and with respect to foe and unkind King Saul.

So David asks his royal servants in II Samuel 9.1,

***"Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul
to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?"***

There is the word kindness...God's kind of kindness.

Verses 2 and 3,

Now there was a servant of Saul's household name Ziba.

They called him to appear before David and the king said to him, 'Are you Ziba?'

'Your servant,' he replied.

The king asked, 'Is there no one still left of the house of Saul

to whom I can show God's kindness?' (Did you hear the word again?)

David is intentional about turning Saul's family,

who once were foes, into friends.

Verse 3b, ***"Ziba answered the king,***

'There is still a son of Jonathan, he is (ah, um, ah) crippled in both feet.'

'Where is he?' the king asks.

Ziba answered, 'He is at the house of Makir so of Ammiel in Lo Debar.'

So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir, son of Ammiel."

WOW!!! Who would have thought?

David invites this dethroned prince, now pauper, to the palace.

David's response is incredible!

That's amazing...amazing grace!

That's kindness...kindness plus...God's kind of kindness!

In ancient times Mephibosheth would have had at least three strikes against him,

First strike, Mephibosheth as Jonathan's son is a potential rival and threat to the David's throne.

The second strike, Mephibosheth is crippled.

Here is how that happened, II Samuel 4.4,

“Saul’s son Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth, who was cripple in both feet.

He was five years old when the news came from Jezreel that Saul and Jonathan were dead.

Mephibosheth’s nurse had picked him up to run away.

But as she turned to leave, she dropped him, and now he was lame.”

People in ancient times would have believed he was less than a person,
that he was a person of little worth.

He himself might have bought into that perspective.

He even said, *“What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?”*

Today it seems we have much more respect for those that are handicapped
and those that are handicapped have much more respect for themselves.

They may feel like victims at times but strive to move past that victim mentality.

David forgot about the present rivalry and potential revenge.

David didn’t look at the label and he didn’t condemn the cripple.

And the third strike, Mephibosheth is from Lo DeBar.

Just as it sounds, Looooo Deeeee Barrrrrr.

It is out in the wilderness, the barren wilderness,

where the sun beats down, scorching the ground and burns anything that tries to move.

The lizards even fight each other for shade.

And KING DAVID invites this pauper of the desert prairie to the king’s palace.

That is incredible!

That is amazing...amazing grace!

That is kindness...kindness plus, God’s kind of kindness!

I’m sure most of you see where this is going.

Three strikes and we’re out of the old ball game, right?

Well actually when we talk about our spiritual lives,

all it takes is one strike and we’re out.

But the Good News is we don’t have to be left out.

Strike one; we too started as princes and princesses.

But because of our sin, because of our fall into sin we’ve become spiritual paupers.

But in Christ we’ve been redeemed,

our royal status has been restored.

God has replaced revenge for our rivalry and rebellion,

with reconciliation through Jesus Christ.

We’re no longer enemies but friends, family even.

In fact he has even given us the ministry of reconciliation

Strike two has been redeemed as well.

God has freed us from our fallen state,

cleanse our crippled souls,

healed our heathen handicaps.

And the third strike, we don't live in Looooow Deeeeebarrrrr
 but we do live in this worldly wilderness where we have "lowered the bar."
 And we live not necessarily fighting for shade
 but fighting for just about everything else...for me, my, and mine.

Paul summarizes our situation and suggests the perfect solution, Titus 3.3 and following,
***"At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved
 by all kinds of passions and pleasures.
 We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.
 But when the kindness (did you catch that?) and love of God our Savior appeared,
 he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done,
 but because of his mercy.
 He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,
 whom he poured out generously (I love that word. It is like getting a full plate of fresh cookies,
 or an extra portion of desert, or being a waitress and receiving a extra large tip)
 whom he poured out generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,
 so that having been justified by grace,
 we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life."***

God calls us from our worldly wilderness into life
 God calls us from this place to his place, his palace, to the very heart of God.
 A place with great accommodations,
 a place with a room for ourselves,
 a place of rest and refuge,
 a place of strength and sanctuary,

That's incredible!
 That's amazing...amazing grace!
 That's kindness...kindness plus...God's kind of kindness!

But there is more.
 David not only invites Mephibosheth to this palace but to live at the palace,
 and not only to live at the palace but to eat with the family at the royal table.

Let's go back to David's throne room, verse 6
***"When Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, son of Saul,
 came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor.
 David said, 'Mephibosheth.'
 'Your servant,' he replied.
 'Don't be afraid,' David said to him, (Mephibosheth was afraid David was going to kill him)
 'for I will surely show you kindness (the word for the day)
 for the sake of your father Jonathan.
 I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul,
 and you will always eat at my table.'***
 David then puts Ziba in charge of the Mephibosheth's business
 and invites Mephibosheth to eat at the king's table.

In fact the Bible tells us that four times, one time even saying, verse 11
"Mephibosheth ate at David's table as if he were one of the king's sons."

And the last time in verse 13,
*“And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem,
 because he always ate at the king’s table,
 and he was crippled in both feet.”*

Just try to put yourself in their time and place and imagine the unimaginable,
 Mephibosheth at the king’s table.

Here is how Charles Swindoll describes it,
 “The dinner bell rings throughout the palace and David comes to the head of the table.
 Then Amnon-clever, crafty, Amnon-sits to David’s left.
 Then lovely and gracious Tamar, David’s bright and beautiful daughter sits next to Amnon.
 Then the brilliant, preoccupied, Solomon, the heir apparent,
 just coming from the library, perhaps even with his nose in a book, and sits at the table.
 Next is Absalom-handsome, winsome Absalom with long flowing black hair down to his shoulders.
 They all wait and finally hear the shuffling of feet and the clump, clump, clump of crutches.
 Mephibosheth awkwardly finds his place at the table and slips into his seat.
 His feet disappear.
 They’re covered by the tablecloth.

Mephibosheth’s story was our communion devotion at a confirmation retreat a couple of years ago.
 We acted it out the table scene.

Tyler Brown was Mephibosheth.
 We told him to pretend he had a walker or cane.
 He took it a step farther or should I say a drag farther.
 When he came to the table
 it was not with the shuffle or the clump, clump,
 but with a crawling sound as he painfully druggg himself,
 pullllled himself to the table.

He simply laid on the ground and used his arms to drag himself to the table.
 The rest of us were seated or standing.

The contrast was incredible.
 It was a very humbling yet insightful and inspiring moment.

As we come to the table today might we be mindful of the faithfulness of God
 the hospitality of the Holy Spirit,
 and the cloth of Christ,
 covering not just our feet,
 but especially and essentially our sin sick souls. Let’s sing the prayer, “Spirit Song”

