

Life and Death Balancing

The sermon text for today is from 2. Samuel 1: verse 1, and verses 17-27. (The below text was copied from the Vanderbilt Divinity Library)

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27

1:1 After the death of Saul, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag.

1:17 David intoned this lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan.

1:18 (He ordered that The Song of the Bow be taught to the people of Judah; it is written in the Book of Jashar.) He said:

1:19 Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places! How the mighty have fallen!

1:20 Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon; or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice, the daughters of the uncircumcised will exult.

1:21 You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor bounteous fields! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, anointed with oil no more.

1:22 From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, nor the sword of Saul return empty.

1:23 Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.

1:24 O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you with crimson, in luxury, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

1:25 How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your high places.

1:26 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.

1:27 How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

I have to say something right off the bat and Barbara is my witness

for this. Last Monday I was doing well and took a look at my

scriptures and studied them and came up with a topic and the title as well as the songs (except for our special music which was an added grace). This all happened last Monday already!! Then, as the week progressed, we lost Ed McMahon, there was the Metro crash where 9 lives were lost and numerous injuries, Farah Fawcett died and Michael Jackson. And yesterday I was with the Burdette/Price Family in our cemetery laying to rest the ashes of Mary Rebecca Burdette Price.

This week has been dominated by Death and we who are alive are faced with balancing our lives in the face of death, - so we are called to do some balancing. We all pretty much know that life on this earth always ends in death and there is no avoiding it. But unless we suffer from some mental illness, we don't think about it **all** the time.

We are in week 3 of the 24 weeks of our church calendar that in many churches is called 'Ordinary Time'. 'Ordinary time' are those weeks following Trinity Sunday, and reach until Advent - a long period of

time. And it is good that we should take some time out in ordinary time to think about death.

Ordinary time is when we look at all the normal things in life. It isn't a Holiday like Christmas or Easter where we all come to church excited and slightly worn out from all the preparations leading up to the day. Ordinary time is more relaxed, a lot less pressure. And now, in ordinary time we are called to think about Death. Not as in something frightening like Halloween, or exalting like Easter, just simple ordinary death. It happens.

There is a whole line of psychological thinking called, Existential Psychology, where the main focus is for therapists to help their patients come to fulfill their lives and get a new perspective on life by coming to realize that their lives all end in death, and the more humans are aware of that, the more emphasis and clarity we can live our days.

So many people who have faced deadly illnesses, like cancer, reported moments when they felt as though they were waking up for the first time in their lives, and were determined to live every remaining day, and not to waste one. Existential psychology's hope is to help their patients to fill their lives with purpose with the same sense of urgency and meaning.

We have, in our faith and amazing existential aspect to it. Our unique God lived his life on this earth knowing clearly that he was going to suffer and die, and he showed us how to live. And we can live as Christ did, because he returned to us, to show us that death is not eternal. We have the opportunity to live life to the fullest and have no fear of death, because we have committed ourselves to this religion and because we spend time thinking about our faith and trying to do as we hear Christ in our lives. We were baptized into Christ and share the resurrection with him as well.

One of my favorite sayings, which I heard in college in central Kentucky, was when we visited the Shakers Village. There was a

sampler on one wall that read, "Lord, help me to live each day as if I would die tomorrow, but work as though I could live forever." And there, in Shaker Village one could find truly creative and quality work!

Balancing the reality of death as we live our lives as fully as we can, what exactly does that mean in our lives?

David, in our scriptures is quoted saying a beautiful and loving elegy of Saul and Jonathan, when he heard that they had died in Battle.

Now it is all good and politically correct, but just previously in Samuel 1 we didn't see such a rosy portrayal of Saul. Saul was terribly jealous of David and tried numerous times to kill him or have him killed. David suffered a great deal at the hands of Saul. And yet, David *can* lament when he hears of their death and say, "Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places!"

Some people may see this phenomenon as being unrealistic and fickle, yet I say, David is wisely reflecting a mature balance of a person's life.

We all have our struggles in life, we are all stumbling around and trying our hardest to become as worthy as we feel we should be. And David somehow knew this. Perhaps he was aware of what potential weaknesses he had which would later get him into big trouble. Whatever it was, he was not recorded in the history books as one who harshly judged the first King of Israel, Saul, - no, David practiced grace.

It is a very enlightening aspect of the human condition when, at the time of death, we find our lives being put on balance. We balance the imperfections against the various gifts and accomplishments.

Regardless of how evil Saul was portrayed in 1st Samuel, we find that on balance, his life was glorious! We, too, can look at the clumsy being or the striving soul when we look at ourselves and at each other and we find that on the whole, God sees us as Glorious.

Because God looks at the spiritual intent and we, who related to God, have access to grace, we are not judged by our actions alone.

We chose between *spiritual* life and death practically every second of our lives and we don't know it. As in the prayer that inspired the song sung before, we can chose to be instruments of peace or of destruction. Sometimes we don't see that we have a choice and just react according to our gut. There are times when we mess up – royally – (to return to the Kings Saul/David analogy). And when we are faced with those weaknesses, it can feel sometimes like a mini death. A small death of the feeling of hope that we had for ourselves that we could truly be as we want to be.

But we have the promise time and time again, of hope for ourselves when we fail; and tremendous joy, almost unbearable to behold, when we succeed. We have for us a Christ who has seen both sides of this life, he has returned, and we share in that experience of eternal life.

Christ has the power to restore our faith in life, when we are feeling that all is lost. Christ can restore our faith in ourselves, when we are overcome with sadness or suffering from what I like to call, “an overwhelming case of being human.”

There are times when we are just tired of trying, and we find that we can rest in God’s strength and God’s mercy, as we will our lives to be lights of him, rather than battle *to be the light ourselves*. Christ tells us, “my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Let us all pick up our Hymnals and read together #468.