

“The Invitation of a Lifetime”

First Sermon in the Stewardship Series “I’m IN!” - “I’m IN-vited”

2 Samuel 5:1-5 and 6:1-5; Psalm 150

New Revised Standard Version

**This manuscript is an interpretation of the sermonic moment. Use it as a guide for the sermon direction; because of time, not everything you read printed here is actually included in the spoken sermon.*

Today we continue the biblical story that the narrative lectionary has shaped for us this fall and we land in 2 Samuel. If you can’t tell by now, we are hop skipping our way through the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, picking up key moments that reveal how God’s people made their way in the world oh so many years ago.

Last week, we heard the beginning of the story of Ruth, as she chose to follow her mother-in-law Naomi to her homeland. Her choice was a risk yet it proves to be one that leads to great blessing as she finds a new husband, Boaz, and they give birth to a baby boy, Obed. Obed becomes the grandfather of David.

Today we meet David as an adult. Today, we see how God continues to lead God’s people through the anointing of David as Israel’s servant leader and king, and through the

celebration of God’s presence in the ark in the midst of the people.

But before we marinate in this marvelous moment of unity and celebration, let’s back up and remember what it took to get here, because a lot has happened in the time period between the Exodus and today’s story. And the reality is, these two excerpts of Scripture are kind of like mountain top experiences surrounded by lots of low points. Celebration happens in the midst of sorrow and chaos, not apart from it.

After Moses led the people out of bondage in Egypt, they received the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. The Israelites then spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness before entering the Promised Land. After their leader Moses died, Joshua became their new leader. Joshua was one of the twelve

spies of Israel sent by Moses to explore the land of Canaan. After the death of Moses, Joshua led the Israelite tribes as they settled in Canaan and allocated the land to the tribes (Numbers 13:1–16).

After Joshua dies and before David becomes the leader of the Israelite people, there is a tenuous time of transition. There was not one key leader, but a lot of smaller leaders called judges, led small clans or tribes of people, and they also served as prophets of God. It was a transitional time because a new community was emerging from disparate groups that were trying to create an entirely new pattern of life.

This new community was to be one in which all citizens had an equal range of opportunities. The Israelites rejected the absolutism of the Canaanite city-states with their oppressive political and social systems. They wanted to serve God and God alone. The book of Judges shows that the creation of this new society was an immense struggle. The leaders during this time of judges exert great power in as they lead in battle against the

enemies of Israel. After defeating these enemies, the judges continued to exercise civil duties among their several clans and tribes.

Over time, the people of Israel grow weary of all these little disputes and divisions among themselves and the elders begin to ask God for a king. They look around at these nations that all have kings for leaders and they think a monarchy is going to be their “secret sauce” to success. And God gives in to their request for a king (1 Samuel 10:1), but not without warning them! It seems the Israelite people are not quite realizing yet that no human system of leadership and governance will ever be perfect. They are looking for a savior in their leadership to swoop in and make everything okay instead of looking within to their own hearts and minds to change their behaviors and beliefs. They are the people of God in name, but they are struggling to be the people of God in action. Sound familiar?

And so, today’s readings reflect a key turning point in the narrative of Israel as a nation:

The 2 Samuel 5 passage notes the moment when David becomes king over all the tribes of Israel *and* Judah.

The transfer of the ark of the Lord in 2 Samuel 6 shows that God is central...God is not scattered in their hearts and minds and lives (literally or figuratively) but rather God is central in their lives. God is the one who binds them together - not their disparate tribes or agendas.

2 Samuel 5:3 marks the culmination of David's rise from shepherd boy to shepherd-king. It also completes Israel's transition from a federation of tribes to a united monarchy with a capital city. That transition began in 1 Samuel 8, when the elders of Israel demanded a king to lead the nation. After the Lord reluctantly agrees to a monarchy, the prophet Samuel appoints Saul as the first king (1 Samuel 10:1). But his leadership quickly spirals downward and Samuel also appoints David as the one who will be Saul's successor. In

addition, David makes a name for himself with Saul in two other ways: 1) as a harpist whose music relieved Saul's torment when an evil spirit from God came upon him (1 Samuel 16:14-23); and 2) as a young man who fearlessly stood before the Philistine warrior Goliath and killed him with stones from his slingshot (1 Samuel 17:20-51). He was subsequently appointed to a high rank in the army by Saul.

David becomes further intertwined with Saul's family because he becomes Saul's son-in-law, and was loved by both Saul's daughter, Michal, and his son, Jonathan. Saul is jealous of David and relentlessly pursues David intending to kill him. As he dodges Saul, David acquired followers, resources, fighting experience, wives, and even a Philistine city to use as a base (Ziklag).¹

Second Samuel begins with the account of David's hearing that Saul and Jonathan had been killed in battle. David responds

¹ Elna K. Solvang, "Commentary on 2 Samuel 5:1-5; 6:1-5; Psalm 150," *Working Preacher* (Oct. 20, 2019), accessed on Oct. 20, 2019 at

https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4213.

to this news with a stirring lament (2 Samuel 1:17-27).

David then goes to Hebron where the people of Judah (in the south) “*anointed David king over the house of Judah*” (2 Samuel 2:4). Saul’s son, Ishbaal, was appointed by Abner, the commander general of Saul’s army, as king over Israel in the north (2 Samuel 2:8).² So there is a division you see...Saul’s biological son Ishbaal is king of the north and Saul’s divinely appointed successor, David, is king of the south.

In 2 Samuel 3:1 we read, “*There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.*”

Today’s 2 Samuel 5 text follows the assassinations of Abner, Saul’s General, (2 Samuel 3:20-30), and Ishbaal, Saul’s son (2 Samuel 4:5-8). David claims that he has nothing to do with these deaths, however - it is quite convenient that his opponent leaders both

die right when David is trying to become King of *all* of Israel. (And - as we’ll learn later after David has an affair with Bathsheba and has her husband killed in battle by ensuring he’s fighting on the front lines - David is not beyond such malicious scheming.)

In any case, with these two deaths, the elders of the northern kingdom of Israel come to Hebron and we read that, “*King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel*” (2 Samuel 5:3).

The verses that follow the anointing of David as king over *all* of Israel report David entering the city of Jerusalem, and his designating it as the capital of the newly united kingdom. Jerusalem was conveniently located between the northern and southern territories so it offered the prospect of aiding in unification.³

So by the time we read the five verses at the beginning of 2 Samuel chapter 5, loss, death,

² Solvang, *ibid.*

³ Solvang, *ibid.*

chaos, power-plays, and instability had reigned long enough during this civil war. Whether people were for David or against him during the civil war of the north and south, there was a sigh of relief and even shouts of celebration when the people were united under one King with a new covenant. It was, if you will, a fresh start...and one, they believed, that was ordained by God.

In the second part of today's reading (2 Samuel 6:1-5), David leads a massive procession to accompany the transfer of the ark of God from Baale-judah to the new capital, Jerusalem. The ark, a large box, functions as God's throne; a visible place for God's invisible presence. (See Exodus 25:10-22.) The Ark represents the agency of God, or the presence of God, symbolically. The ark went ahead of the Israelites as they journeyed through the wilderness.⁴ And it had been quite a journey. There were years they had been separated from the ark...the Philistines captured it in battle and it brought them "bad luck" for

lack a better term. But then it came back to Israel and people died when they looked at it, so they sent it away to "storage" for a while to Abinidab's house and his son Elazar was put in charge of guarding it. They were kind of afraid of it. Or at the very least, didn't know what to make of it.⁵

By retrieving the ark from Abinadab's house in 2 Samuel 6, David sets out to deliver a visible sign of the Lord's presence in the new capital. Other ancient Near Eastern rulers demonstrated their allegiance to their god(s) and signaled divine favor upon their rule by processing a statue of their city's god into the capital and housing the statue in a temple designated for that god.⁶

But two things stand out in the account of David's procession: 1) there is no temple in which to place the ark; during David's reign it will reside in a tent; 2) the procession is interrupted (in the verse following the end of today's reading the ark wobbles and someone reaches out to touch it to steady it, and they are struck dead); this a

⁴ Solvang, *ibid.*

⁵ Solvang, *ibid.*

⁶ Solvang, *ibid.*

reminder that the divine presence and power that accompany the ark are not under David's control.⁷ God is, in fact, still the one in control. David is not a "god," David is a human king. He can't control everything.

David freaks out and sends the ark away to a farm (the house of Obed-edom the Gittite) for three months and because the house was blessed and nothing bad happened while it was there, then finally David calls for it to come back out and its finally brought all the way into Jerusalem. And there is another parade and great fanfare - and a nearly-naked David dances before the Lord with wild abandon, joy, and praise. (Just in case you were thinking: I thought David danced naked when he brought the ark into Jerusalem?? Well, he did. Your memory from childhood Sunday School is correct...it's just that that was the *second* time the ark was brought in. The first attempt is what we read today. I suppose it is slightly comforting to know that in the people's attempt to put God at the center of their

lives, they got scared because something tragic happened and were skiddish. But - they tried again. They continued to seek to be in God's presence.

They put the ark in their midst not to control it, but to worship it. And what were the worshipping? Well, symbolically it was the presence of God, and literally it was the Word of God...the scrolls of Torah. The Word of God was central to who they were as a people and to their acts of worship.

When David brings the ark to Jerusalem he's placing the Word of God at the center of the people.

Where does God promise to meet us? Well, God is everywhere, but David brings the ark to Jerusalem because God promises to meet people where the ark is...God promises to meet people where the Word is...and that in turn has had a long effect in terms of how we understand our own worship - as far as all the celebration - the singing, the dancing, it's all a way of

⁷ Solvang, *ibid.*

celebrating the presence of God who promises to meet us in the Word, which remains central to our worship today.⁸

What would it mean for us as a congregation to put God at the center of our life? What does it mean not just for us individually to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and strength (going back to Deuteronomy 6) but what does it mean for us as a people to put God at the center of our lives together? To talk about God as the power that binds us together...that unites us...despite all of our differences? Well, I think it means to realize that worship is a key way that God IN-vites us into God's presence.

Today we begin a new series for our stewardship season called "*I'm In: I'm IN-vited, I'm IN-spired, I'm IN-volved, I'm IN-vested.*"

Beginning with this new theme of *I'm IN-vited*, we celebrate that before we ever extend any invitations ourselves, God has first extended us the greatest

invitation of all – the invitation to life. We live and move and have our being in the world because of God. We are invited to take part in the work of Jesus' kin-dom here on earth by a God who wants us to be a part of the action...who wants to be central in our lives, no matter *who* we are.

We are invited to be in relationship with God by virtue of God extending Godself to us through the Word, the Torah, and then later through the Word made flesh - Jesus, the Messiah, the incarnate presence of God.

The reason why worship is so important is because it centralizes us as a community in the presence of God. Sure, we believe that God is present everywhere, but we also believe that something special happens in this hour - that where two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus - the Spirit is present. God meets us here in a very palpable way as we set aside the rest of our lives and schedules to "show up" for God, if you will. We don't have

⁸ Rolf Jacobson, Craig R. Koester, and Kathryn M. Schifferdecker, "NL Podcast 377: David Anointed King," *I Love to Tell the Story* (12 Oct. 2019), accessed on Oct. 20, 2019 at

https://www.workingpreacher.org/narrative_podcast.aspx?podcast_id=1185.

to be in this sanctuary to meet God, but if we're honest with ourselves, it sure helps, doesn't it? This place provides us with a kind of "ark" of God's presence - a physical reminder of God's role and place in our lives.

Isn't that why we come back week after week? Not just because the music is moving or the preaching is great or the community is nice or there's free food after worship. We show up, I believe, because we all want to meet God here. We all want to figure out where God is in the chaos of our everyday lives...and in the mundane moments too.

Why does worship matter? Well, while we'd all answer that question differently, I think it matters because the physical presence of being with people on the journey of faith who also want God to be central in their lives is important...it reminds me I'm not alone and it calls me to a higher place in terms of my ethics and decisions and orientation to time and priorities in life.

Worship is where we are reminded that we are co-

creators of God's kin-dom here on earth. Worship is where we give to God all that we are, trusting that God will take all that we are and use that to take us one step further in this next week.

This is a gift that King David reminds us of today as he brought the ark into Jerusalem and led a procession of singing and dancing and instrumental praise.

We are not perfect. But as David reminds us, in the presence of God we are reminded of our imperfections and yet are called to a higher standard than the standards we'd occupy on our own accord. Good leadership does this.

It's been a reflective week for our country as we have begun to mourn Representative Elijah Cummings. Certain public servants show forth by their lives and their convictions and their words and their commitment to equality and justice for all. They remind us of the higher standards to which we are called. Representative Cummings was one such public servant.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson wrote of his friend of 40+ years this week,

“Elijah Cummings understood the meaning of struggle. People like Elijah do not come like grapes in bunches; he was the rarest of breeds. He walked and worked with queens, kings, speakers and presidents, yet he treasured traversing and conversing with his Baltimore family the most. In the best of times, as well as during the most challenging of times, Elijah Cummings remained steadfast in his love for, his belief in and his presence among his community...

A wise person once said, "If you want to test a man's character, give him power." This was a test that he passed with the highest marks...His adversaries were never his enemies. And all who worked with him, whatever their political persuasion, found him to be tough, smart, honest, honorable and fair. Even as he was assailed...he never ceded his personal dignity, nor that of

the constituents that he represented, by responding in kind. In so doing, he lifted his community and elevated our nation...

Elijah Cummings never stopped believing in the American dream and pressed ahead until his last days to give every citizen, aspirant and actual, access to that dream as well as all of the blessings of our great republic.”⁹

Elijah Cummings was not perfect. No human leader is. But his actions over a lifetime of public service proved his commitments to his constituents, and to the values that guided his decisions, and to the rights that he believed were for every single person who lives in these United States.

Similarly, David was far from a perfect leader, as we all know. But for today - the snapshot we have of his leadership is admirable and hopeful. In these moments - he got it right. And we can celebrate that. In these two moments in 2 Samuel, he has every intention to place

⁹ Rev. Jesse Jackson, “Jesse Jackson: Elijah Cummings was a man of dignity and discipline,” *CNN Opinion* (18 Oct. 2019), accessed on Oct. 20, 2019 at

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/18/opinions/elijah-cummings-tribute-jackson/index.html>.

God at the forefront of the people's minds and hearts. Because God is at the forefront of his mind and heart.

Because God calls us to a higher standard of love than we would have if we were left to our own devices. David has seen it in his people and he will soon see it in his own life...we humans have the ability to forget who God is and what calls us too...so we need reminders...we need the ark...we need worship. Because - we need God. And one another.

We are all here because of God. *All that we have and all that we do and all that we are* is because of God. God has invited us into this journey of life and faith – and praise and worship is our first and lasting response to such an invitation.

We gather each Sunday to celebrate in worship as people together in the midst of God's presence. As God's people we remember that we are all invited to be here and we all have a place at the table. As we celebrate our own invitation from God, we are challenged to now look outward and see who

else in our lives needs to know that they, too, are invited by God and they, too, have a place at the table.

U.S. Diplomat, author, public speaker, Bob Goff writes in his book LOVE DOES:

“There is only one invitation it would kill me to refuse, yet I'm tempted to turn it down all the time. I get the invitation every morning when I wake up to actually live a life of complete engagement, a life of whimsy, a life where LOVE DOES. It doesn't come in an envelope. It's ushered in by a sunrise, the sound of a bird, or the smell of coffee drifting lazily from the kitchen. It's the invitation to actually live, to fully participate in this amazing life for one more day. [Most people don't turn down] an invitation to the White House, but I've seen plenty of people turn down an invitation to fully live.

Turning down this invitation comes in lots of flavors. It looks like numbing yourself or distracting yourself or seeing something really beautiful as normal. It can also look like refusing to forgive or not being grateful or getting wrapped

around the axle with fear or envy. I think every day God sends us an invitation to live and sometimes we forget to show up or get head-faked into thinking we haven't really been invited. But you see, we have been invited -- every day, all over again...

Every day God invites us on the same kind of adventure. It's not a trip where He sends us a rigid itinerary, He simply invites us. God asks what it is He's made us to love, what it is that captures our attention, what feeds that deep indescribable need of our souls to experience the richness of the world He made. And then, leaning over us, He whispers, "Let's go do that together..."

If you want to know the answer to the bigger question — "what's God's plan for the whole world" — buckle up: it's us." We're part of God's much bigger plan for the whole world. Just like God's Son arrived here, so did you. And after Jesus arrived, God whispered to all of humanity... "It's your move." Heaven's been leaning over the rails in the same way ever since you

got here, waiting to see what you'll do with your life."

You see, our first move is accepting the invitation to life that God has given us, and to life together in this community called Calvary, where we worship God just as we are - hoping that we will leave a bit different than when we walked through the doors this morning.

Every worship service may just be a suspended moment in time where we praise God and then go back into our lives where chaos surrounds us and the world seems to be falling part...just as these two moments in Scripture show highlights in David's narrative amidst great strife and controversy. But they are equally important moments in time, if not more important, than the many more moments of chaos that surround them. We have to stop sometimes and say - we are unified by a Creator that is greater than our own agendas. We have to stop sometimes and take a deep breath and simply look at the blessings in our life and give praise to God - acknowledging the presence of God in our lives. Just as these two sections

of text seems like little rainbows of harmony and praise dropped in the middle of a thunder storm of powerplays and destruction - we still need the rainbows, right? We still need those moments to celebrate and give thanks? We can't afford not to take such moments. We can't afford not to dance in praise before God at any opportunity that we get.

It's the invitation of a lifetime - to say "yes" to the presence of God in your life...and in this place...over and over and over again.

It's the invitation of a lifetime both because we'll never get a better invitation or one more important to shaping our lives of faith -- to show up and meet God's presence with *our* presence. *And* it's the invitation of a lifetime because it never runs out - even we don't accept it...the invitation remains...every single day of our lives...and it's not just for us, it's for everyone!

"Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord!" (Psalm 150)

As we praise, may we IN-vite others to experience the presence of God in this place too. Whatever the reason is for why you are here this morning...that reason is good enough for someone you know in your life that you could invite to join us. In so many ways, we are all looking for the same things: for hope, for community, for reassurance, for comfort, for challenge, for a way to make a difference, for a place to get centered, for a people who will care for us and journey alongside us, and for people we can serve with and learn from. And we all have a place at the Table.

God has invited us all. God is throwing the party. God is the host at the Table. God just needs our help handing out the invitations. You have yours. Won't you accept it? And then, pass some out to others?

Amen.