
Grace & Peace

Indian River Presbyterian Church

October 1, 2006

A letter from your pastor, Mike Malone...

I am losing my 'sniffer'...my sense of smell. I have heard that it happens as we get older. I guess I'm getting older. But every once in a while I 'sniff' something that mesmerizes me; stuns me; amazes me. It happened this week as I was reading 2 Samuel 9. I sniffed the sweet fragrance of Christ; the sweet fragrance of the gospel.

2 Samuel 9 is the short story of David and Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth is the son of David's good friend, Jonathan. Jonathan, of course, is the son of Saul who died with his father in battle with the Philistines. That left Mephibosheth orphaned...fatherless...unprotected.

Mephibosheth had more disadvantages than being fatherless. He was also a cripple. When Saul and Jonathan were killed, Mephibosheth was in Jerusalem. After news arrived that his father and grandfather (the King and heir apparent) were dead, the nurse caring for the child hurried to remove him from the city. She certainly thought that he was in danger, since the boy's father and grandfather were not present to protect him. Nature does abhor a vacuum and when the King is gone, there will be a rush to fill the it. In her panic, the nurse fell, the boy's feet were crushed and he never walked again. Fatherless and invalid. Unprotected and incapable of providing for himself.

There is more. Saul had come to hate David. His jealousy had driven him to fits of rage. On two occasions he sought to murder David. He attempted to drag his son, David's devoted friend, into his web of deceit. In those days it was not uncommon to regard all members of the family of the former King as enemies and have them executed. Mephibosheth was unprotected, invalid and a wanted man. Who would have been surprised to learn that David sought the execution of **any** male member of Saul's family? Who would have been surprised to learn that David wanted to kill Mephibosheth?

There is still more. Mephibosheth lived in a place called Lo Debar. (It's great to have been to seminary and to have learned a little Hebrew!!) 'Lo' is a word that means 'no' or 'not'. The word 'debar' has several meanings. But its root means 'speak', or 'declare', or 'promise'. It can have the force of 'lead' or 'command'. Somehow, probably in connection with shepherds who would 'lead' or 'command' cattle and sheep, the word came to be used of 'pasture', places to graze. The two senses of the word well describe where Mephibosheth lived: he lived in a place where there was 'not pasture'; he lived in a place where there was 'no word', 'no promise'. That is, Mephibosheth lived in place where there was no hope.

Mephibosheth...no protector, no provider, a wanted man, living in a place of despair and hopelessness.

It is at this point that my 'sniffer' begins to come to life. I am Mephibosheth. All of these things that characterize his life are the contours and fragrances of my own. The contours are jagged and broken. The fragrances are the aroma of death. The word 'sinner' is not a self-designation anyone likes to use. But that is what I am...a sinner. And being a sinner means that I am an orphan...alone in the world...exposed to its dangers and uncertainties...unprotected and not safe. I am a cripple...I am broken...seriously mangled and incapable of fixing myself...helpless. I am the progeny of a rebel, and so, am a rebel myself. I am at odds with the King...exposed to the just and righteous execution of his perfect judgment...naked before the power of his Kingly authority. I, too, am a wanted man. And I, too, live in a place of 'no pasture'...a place where 'no word' is heard...a place that is barren, deserted, empty, dark, dreary and...hopeless. This may be the worst thing of all. The longings in my soul are for protection, provision and freedom from the threat of judgment. But where I am there is no word...and nothing satisfies...everything is tasteless.

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But then there is the King. The last few verses of 2 Samuel 8 are important to this story. Verse 15 says, 'David reigned over **all** Israel'. There was not one inch of Israel over which David did not reign...not one inch...not even Lo Debar. And the text also says that David reigned 'doing what was just and right for **all** his people'. There was not one person over whom David did not exercise a just and righteous rule...not one person...Mephibosheth included. A just and righteous King...what would that be like? How just and how righteous? So just and so righteous that he would do the entirely unexpected and, dare I say it, gracious thing: he would seek out the threat to his throne; the orphan, the cripple; he would 'speak' into the place of no speech; he would call to the person in 'no pasture' and summon him to come...indeed to be carried...to the place of refreshment, security and safety. He would reconcile him to himself. He would take it upon himself to secure the well-being of the one in Lo Debar.

Now my 'sniffer' is working overtime. I can smell the aroma of mercy, of kindness, of grace. Do you begin to see what this story is about? What it is to be a Christian? Do you see what the King has done?

Recently, we affirmed our faith with words from the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 26: "What do you believe when you say, 'I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth'?" Answer: "That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them, who still upholds and rules them by his eternal counsel and providence, is *my* God and Father because of Christ his son. I trust him so much that I do not doubt he will provide whatever I need for Body and soul, and he will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends me in this sad world. He is *able* to do this because he is almighty God; and he *desires* to do this because he is a faithful Father." This is one way of describing what happens in 2 Samuel 9. "I will surely show you kindness...I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather..." (v. 7) David becomes the father of Mephibosheth; his provider; his protector; his security.

This is what you see in David. But you see it much more clearly in the greater King, King Jesus. What has He done? What is it to be a Christian? The King has inquired about me; He has called out to me; He has laid hold of me...me...orphaned, crippled, a rebel, living in death and despair. And He has born me, cripple that I am, to His city. But beyond His city, He has born me to His palace. But beyond His palace, He has born me to His table. He has brought me into His home and has seated me with Him that He might show me kindness all my days, that I might feast with Him forever. And He does one other unimaginable thing. He gives me everything He has. The promise to Mephibosheth from David was to restore all of the lands of Saul to him. Saul was the king!!!! It was **all** his. My greater King, Jesus, makes me inherit all of the fullness of His kingdom, the kingdom he received from His father.

This is what the King has done by his death and resurrection. As I think about this, I find, again, this yearning, this deep longing to have our church be the kind of place where people can hear this kind of gospel...the only true gospel. The story of a King who takes the orphaned, the crippled, the rebels, the hopeless and seats them at His table and gives them the promise that He will show them His kindness all their days. Oh, how I long for the people of this community to hear of this kind of King...and Savior!!

I guess my 'sniffer' is still working.

Blessings.

Mike