Grace: It Really Is Amazing

Vienna Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Charles Geschiere
2 Samuel 9 (Psalm 23)

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In Seminary, in preaching class, we were constantly reminded about the value of a good story or illustration. Following the example of Jesus, of course, who often told stories to make key points in his teaching. We tend to remember a story; we can connect an illustration to our own life. As a result, we’ll remember the point trying to be made. It is why we all like the children’s message, right? A story, illustration, or object lesson, grabs you—we relate to it, remember it.

What we have here in II Samuel, Chapter 9, is not just a story about David, or a story about Mephibosheth. It is a story about God, about us. About God and us. It is an object lesson about grace, and what the grace of God really looks like. What is so interesting about this chapter is that it’s also a living example of the truths of the 23rd Psalm, written by David, which is great since we’re actually people and not sheep. You want to talk about favorite verses? Psalm 23 is on almost everybody’s list! So I’d like to use the words of the 23rd Psalm to make this particular story come alive even a bit more:

Psalm 23:1a—“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.”

“The Lord” is a King—King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. David is a King (he has just become the king—read about that in II Samuel 5). He has everything he needs, and he has it in abundance. He lives in the biggest city in Israel, in the biggest home. He controls the purse-strings of the nation. He’s the leader of the army;
he commands thousands upon thousands of men. He rules the nation. He’s the head law-maker and the lead law-enforcer. All the resources of his country are at his disposal. He has all the foods in all their variety to eat—and prepared for him. All the finest drink. He has women! He has song! He even has wine! He’s rich, he’s powerful, he’s famous. He can do whatever he wants for whomever he wants, whenever and wherever he wants!

God, of course, is that times whatever big number you can think of—and He is especially that for all those whom He calls and considers to be His children!

Enter Mephibosheth…a cripple—“crippled in both feet.” How did that happen? II Samuel 4, verse 4, states that Mephibosheth “was five years old when the news [of the deaths] of [King] Saul and [his son] Jonathan came from Jezreel.” The King died by his own hand when he saw that the battle was lost. Jonathan was killed in the battle. Mephibosheth was Jonathan’s son, which meant—since the King and his heir, his son, were dead—that David would become the new King! The custom back then in the surrounding nations was that a new King would have all the members of the former king’s family executed, so that the new king would have no rivals to the throne.

That’s what Mephibosheth’s nurse thought would happen. We’re told that, “his nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell….” A safe assumption is she fell, too, on top of him, and both of his ankles were severely broken. It says simply, “… and he became crippled.”

The nurse, of course, had no idea that David was a different kind of a king, that he was “a man after God’s own heart.” The Lord is also a different kind of a King—he is like
a shepherd to his sheep. David, of course, had also once been a shepherd.

Psalm 23:1b, 2: “He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters.”

So, what happened to Mephibosheth after his nurse fled with him? After his legs were broken? Verse 4 tells us that he “was at the house of Makir, in Lo Debar.” He was taken almost as far away as he could be taken from his former home, away from his family lands, and still be in the country.

Here’s what’s so cool, “Lo Debar” literally means, “No pasture.” It’s a desolate region, it’s dry, so much so, there’s no pastureland. Nothing really grows there. The land is hard. There is no river, let alone a quiet stream.

He’s poor, he’s handicapped, he can’t earn a living, He lives in the embodiment of Psalm 63—“a dry and weary land where there is no water” And, so, no pasture. What he doesn’t know, because he was only five years old at the time when his father, Jonathan, died, is that David had made a Covenant with his father. A promise made long before he was even born!

We find the story in I Samuel 20. David had been anointed to become the new king, eventually. Jonathan made a request of him: “Do not ever cut off your kindness to my family, not even after the Lord has cut off every one of David’s enemies from the face of the earth.” David made that promise!
King Saul is dead, Jonathan is dead—David is King. After 18 years of battles, problems and nation-rebuilding, things are finally calm. So, David asks, “Is there anyone of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” (verse 1). You see? He remembered his promise, and he’s told about Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s crippled son, about 23 years-old now.

Verse 5 tells us, “So King David had him brought from Lo Debar” where there was no pasture! No water! And, what does he do? He gives him back all of his family’s lands—good land, pastureland, where there was water—with many servants and their many sons to work it—to make it useful and beneficial to him!

You know what I love about this story? I am Mephibosheth. You are Mephibosheth. Crippled. Spiritually crippled! Helpless. Poor. In dark desolation. But before you were born, without you even being aware, God made a promise to bring you up and out of a spiritual “Lo Debar”—where there is no pasture—and make you “to lie down in green pastures, to lead you beside still waters….”

David took the initiative because of a promise! God took the initiative because of a promise! David asks, “Is there anyone to whom I can show kindness?” And notice: he doesn’t ask: “Is there anyone worthy of my kindness? Is there anyone good enough to receive my goodness?” He asks, “Is there anyone, anyone at all, anyone of any kind?” God didn’t ask: “Is there anyone good enough to show my kindness toward? Is there
anyone worthy of my favor? Anyone who’s earned it?” It’s unconditional! *I am Mephibosheth, and, so are you.*

**Psalm 23, next line:** “He, the Lord our Shepherd—restores my soul…”

The name Mephibosheth literally means either “scattered in shame,” or “removal of shame.” *My name, and your name, is Mephibosheth.* Without Christ, “scattered in shame,” because of our sin! But because of Christ, because of his initiative to make a promise and keep a promise, to die and pay for my sin and yours on the cross—if and when we believe in him and what he has done—“the shame” has been “removed,” our soul has been restored, and we’re given a new life! *From “scattered in shame” to the “removal of shame”!*

**Psalm 23:3**—“He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” Mephibosheth, of course, remained a cripple, but he was given servants to work for him. So if you think about it, lifestyle-wise, it was like he could walk just fine, like he could work his own land, like he could produce his own crops!

By ourselves, even saved by Christ, we are still so weak, and in so many ways, still so very crippled. But we’ve been given a servant who works for us as well, to work in us and through us, the Holy Spirit! Because of the Holy Spirit, we can “walk,” even if it’s nothing more really than a limp, on “the paths of righteousness.” Because of the Holy Spirit, we can work and produce a harvest of some love, a bit of joy, a little peace, a smidgen of patience, an ounce of kindness, a
smittering of goodness, a taste of faithfulness, a hint of gentleness, and spare moments of self-control.

We don’t walk all that well sometimes, but we’re walking! The more we “keep in step with the Spirit,” the better we will walk. And, when we trip and fall, he won’t fall on us—he’ll pick us up, dust us off, and send us on our way again, so that we can keep walking, even limping, forward. *We are Mephibosheth.*

**Psalm 23:4**—“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”

Truth: When Mephibosheth was told that the king wanted to see him, that he was to be brought back to Jerusalem, he figured that he would now be executed. His hiding place had been revealed, he had been found. He had lived some eighteen years since the new king had come into his throne, since the day his nurse had fled with him, but now this was it, the day of reckoning had come, and so, he thought, he was about to face the sword. When he was brought before King David, it says in verse 6, “he bowed to pay him honor.” In doing so—he offered David his neck! To be cut off! He’s afraid, but he’s ready—he thinks he knows what is coming next. But what does he hear? “Mephibosheth!” His name! Shouted with enthusiasm, excitement, happiness, like he was David’s long-lost friend, like he was family. And next? What does he hear? “Do not be afraid!” In other words: “You’re
not going to be executed! You’re not going to die! You’re going to live!”

In John 10, Jesus talks about himself as “the good shepherd.” He adds that, “he calls his own sheep by name.….” My name is—Mephibosheth. I am Mephibosheth, and so are you!

The Lord says, “Mephibosheth—do not be afraid….,” He had been, for almost twenty years, more afraid of David than anyone else! But, because of a promise made between his father and David (which he didn’t know about, of course), David was, in fact, the last person in the world that he needed to fear!

Truth: without faith in Jesus, God the Father is the one being in the universe that we ought to fear more than anyone else. If you aren’t a person of faith in Jesus Christ, and you’re not afraid of God—you’re not thinking. But by faith in Christ, because of a promise made between the Father and the Son, by the Father and Jesus, the last being we need to be afraid of is God. We can “walk through the valley of the shadow of death”—fearing nothing, no one, especially not God—because the Lord, our shepherd, is right there with us.

“Fear not,” said the angel, “for behold, I bring good news of great joy. Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!” “God With us”—Immanuel! Our Shepherd!
Psalm 23:5—“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”

Jesus once told the story of a Great Banquet hosted by a great man who had invited many guests—all of whom had an excuse as to why they could not come. The man said to his servants, “Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.” And they all came!

You see? That’s me! That’s you! Mephibosheths all! Did you notice? Four times in this chapter—verses 7, 10, 11, and 13—there’s a reference to Mephibosheth eating at David’s table: twice it is on David’s lips as a promise: “You will always eat at my table.” Once as a statement of fact. Lastly, it’s stated as a completed fact: “he always ate at the king’s table.” And, who else was around that table? David’s own children: Amnon—strong soldier, tall, strapping. Kileab—today he’d probably be a model. Absalom—tall, handsome, golden-haired, a natural-born leader. Tamar—a daughter, beautiful, charming. Others equally as amazing, and Mephibosheth—the poor, crippled son of a dead friend whom David had basically adopted as his own son—he also ate at David’s table, like one of the king’s sons and daughters.

This is a very powerful picture for me—it’s one of the reasons why I love this story. In December, 1999, my wife and I, already blessed with four children, adopted a little five-year-old girl from Russia. We went to Russia together, met her, did the court appearance, and we were given custody the next day. Then I came back to relieve my father-in-law, to help with the other kids. My wife and
Grace (that was the new name we gave her) were scheduled to arrive at Dulles airport on Christmas Eve.

Because the plane was due around 6:00 pm, and I knew everybody would be coming home hungry, I made a stew in the crock-pot. I cut up the meat, the potatoes, carrots, celery, put in the cans of tomatoes, the spices, and let it sit all day. The kids and I set the table in the dining room, made it all nice and fancy—so that when we got home from the airport, whenever that would be, we could all sit down and eat together. To watch this tiny, under-nourished, five-year-old child—at the same table as our other four children—pop the carrots and potatoes and celery and meat that I had cut and prepared with my own hands, this tiny orphan whom we had chosen and adopted, and who was now equal in our eyes as our other four children…. It was one of the most profound spiritual experiences of my life. I thought—“She is me! I am looking at a picture of myself!” Adopted by the Father, a brother to His Son, Jesus, brought into the Divine Family, welcomed to eat at the King’s Table, now and forever.

You know, there’s also something very powerful about making food for another. It says: I care about you! I care about your life! I care that you have a future! When we come to the King’s Table, as crippled orphans, that’s what he says: I care about you! I care about your life! I care that you have a future!

And one day, around the Father’s Banquet Table will sit all of His adopted, Mephibosheth-like, children along with His only-begotten Son—you’ll recognize him: he’s the one with scars in his hands. I am...You are...Mephibosheth.
Psalm 23:5—“You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.”

Mephibosheth, of course, never became king—only David was “anointed” King. But the king treated him like a Prince! His entire inheritance as the grandson of a former king was given back to him. He went from poverty to riches, from low estate to high, from desolation to beauty, from being, basically, alone to being a part of a family, from emptiness to fullness. The same is true for Mephibosheths such as ourselves—now, and to a far greater degree, later!

Psalm 23:6—“Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

“And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king’s table” (verse 13). That’s why he lived in Jerusalem—so that he could be close to the king’s table where he would go to eat, every day, every meal.

Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many rooms; I go to prepare a place for you… and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may be where I am….” So that we’re close enough to be able to eat with the Lord at the Father’s banquet table. In that we are so much like Mephibosheth, it’s so wonderful to read that the king said: “you will always eat at the king’s table.” “You will always eat at my table.” And then, to read, that Mephibosheth always ate at the king’s table”—like one of the king’s own sons and daughters.
The king *made* a promise; the king *kept* his promise. The king *reached* out to him because of a promise made, and took him in as a promise kept.

The Lord made a promise; and the Lord kept a promise. The Lord reached out to us because of a promise made, and took us in as a promise kept.

For a Mephibosheth like myself—you yourself—it’s just nice to know, isn’t it? That God *makes* promises—and He will *keep* all of His promises!

My question of God—perhaps yours—is Mephibosheth’s question of David in verse 8: “What is your servant that you should notice a dead dog like me?” Grace—it *really* is amazing.

What is your servant that you should notice a dead dog like me?

2 Samuel 9.8