

Proper 14, Year B, Track 1

2 Samuel 18:5-9,15,31-33

Psalm 34:1-8

Ephesians 4:2-5:2

John 6:35, 41-51

Good Morning. I am so glad you could join us for worship on this 12th Sunday After Pentecost while Emily+ spends some time with her family on vacation.

Today's lessons are about a father and his son. One story weaves a tale about the relationship between a father and son who were members of a family who were foundational to salvation history. It took place around 870 BC. In fact, their role in God's revelation of salvation history is so pivotal, that without them, the story of salvation cannot be told.

The other takes place during Jesus' ministry. It is the apostle John's gospel portrayal of Jesus describing who He is in relation to God. As is often the case with John, he foreshadows a theological and mystical importance of Jesus as Christ as he documents Jesus' earthly journey with his followers and believers.

We will briefly look at these two stories then jump to more recent times as we try to understand their meaning today by looking at a story about a mother, a father, a son and a daughter.

At first glance, without getting into the context, it seems as if our first reading is simply a story of David in battle and how his commander Joab defeated an enemy of the king (David's own son Absalom) and killed him.

Absalom comes from the Hebrew words meaning "the father is peace", "God's peace", "father of peace". At this stage in our story, there is very little peace that Absalom has brought to anyone.

There is more going on here than meets the eye. A dear friend recently gave me a print that says, "Remember, as far as everyone else is concerned, we are a nice normal family."

It sums up well what is going on here. Joab wasn't just David's commander he was David's nephew. He didn't kill just an enemy of the king, he killed his own cousin. David had lost another son Amnon at the command of his half brother Absalom. David's daughter Tamar was raped by her own half brother Amnon and Absalom was Tamar's brother.

Now do you get the picture? David's family, the root of Jesse upon whom all salvation history hinges was "a nice normal family." Hopefully, putting it into this context shows you how wonderfully powerful and awesome God's grace is at lifting up the lowly and working through our weaknesses and failures to unfold and reveal salvation.

Absalom's rebellion against his father was not so much out of defiance as it was out of anger for what happened to his sister Tamar and their family and seeking justice.

Anger has so much power over us doesn't it? Sometimes it can be transformative and make us better, the world better. The public theologian Ruby Sales calls this "redemptive anger". Sometimes anger seeks only destruction and self-preservation at the cost of others.

David knows loss, he knows victory, he knows joy, and he knows great sadness. This 'victory' was not a joyful one for him and rather than congratulate his victors he grievously mourns the death of his son, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

In our Gospel reading, John starts giving us the theological glimpses of the importance of Jesus as Christ — the anointed one, the messiah without labeling it that yet. This crowd has been following Jesus for some time. And we catch the first glimpses of them becoming skeptical of Jesus as they begin to murmur about where he came from as they knew his father and mother and that he was the carpenter's son.

Remember, David wanted to have died in place of his son. Something, not even he, great king that he was could accomplish. Only God could accomplish that through Christ. Absalom hung in the balance between heaven and earth and Jesus in our Gospel lesson is proclaiming himself to be the bread of life, come down from heaven. He is the way to the Father and anyone who believes shall not hunger, nor thirst, but have eternal life.

Hunger and thirst are basic needs. I imagine, few of us have literally known physical hunger or physical thirst. In the 21st century, the meaning of thirsting and hungering is somewhat lost amidst most of us. The public theologian and human rights activist Ruby Sales learned to ask during her involvement in the civil rights movement, "Where does it hurt?" She learned that question had the ability to get to the core of human dynamics.

We may not literally hunger and thirst, but I imagine many in this community hurt at one time or another, in some form or another. What does Jesus' bread of life discourse promising those who believe will not hunger and thirst but have eternal life mean to us today?

From 1905 to 1948 four people were born in three different states. Their lives would all come to a meeting point on a hot summer day in August of 1965.

The first person born was named Connie, who was born on August 20, 1905 in Vermont. The second person born was named Tom born November 26, 1910 in Alabama. The third person born was Jonathan, born March 30, 1939 in the state of New Hampshire. The fourth person born was named Ruby and she was born on July 8, 1948 in the state of Alabama. Respectively, each of them was a mother, a father, a son, and a daughter. Those are the relational roles of each we will focus on for the purposes of our story. Only two were parent child. The father and mother were not husband and wife. The son and daughter were not siblings. The other parent was not the parent to the other child.

The story I am about to tell is factual but it is not an actual detailing of the events that happened in their lives. Rather, it comes from gathering the details of their lives and placing the timeline of their lives, the events of their lives, the economic conditions and demographic conditions of their lives into context.

Connie born in 1905, the daughter of a doctor. She grew up in affluent white Vermont society. She would later marry a man who too would become a doctor and take her a short distance away from her hometown in Vermont, to Keene, NH. They settled in Keene in 1932. The demographics of Keene, NH then, as well as now, haven't changed too much — approximately 93% caucasian and 1% African American and 3% Hispanic. Keene then, as well as now, had a population around 22,000 people. It was and is basically your quintessential all American New England town.

Being the young wife of the young doctor in town, she quickly set about establishing herself and volunteering and getting involved in town. She was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. As she became a mother, she made sure that her children only associated with children from proper families.

Tom was born in 1910 in Hayneville, AL. His father was the Lowndes County superintendent of schools. He grew up in a county that was 80% African American and only 18% caucasian. Up until 1965, 0% of the African Americans in the county eligible to vote were registered to vote. The violence and terror local whites used to keep white supremacy in place gave the county the nickname "Bloody Lowndes". In the height of the depression in 1933, Tom's father got him a job with the Alabama State Highway Department in Lowndes County. Tom returned to his home town and married the daughter of a Presbyterian minister in 1937. In 1939, their first child, Tom, Jr was born.

Our third individual, Jonathan, was born on March 20, 1939 in Keene, NH. He grew up in the affluent white society. As we've mentioned before, Keene's demographics were very different than the demographics of Alabama. Almost reverse. Whereas, Tom grew up in a community that was 85% African American, Jonathan grew up in a community that was 93% caucasian.

Jonathan would eventually attend Virginia Military Institute and graduate in 1961. His father would die in 1959 during his junior year and after graduation Jonathan attended graduate school at Harvard then in 1963 would enter the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, MA. In the early spring of 1965, he would answer Rev. Martin Luther King's call for clergy to march in Alabama from Selma to Montgomery.

Our fourth individual, Ruby was born July 8, 1948 in Jemison, AL. She attended segregated schools in Alabama. Her spiritual up bringing would be in the "black folk religion" movement made up of ordinary people, who participated in extraordinary things and not so much as black preachers like in the black church. She'd describe her spiritual upbringing in this way, "our parents were spiritual geniuses who created a world and a language where the notion that I was

inadequate or inferior or less than never touched my consciousness.” In the summer of 1965, her involvement in the Southern Freedom Movement and the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee would bring her to Lowndes County, Alabama.

Somehow, through his first and second years at ETS, Jonathan had found the bread of heaven in Christ that did away with hunger and with thirst. He'd arrive in Alabama early that summer of 1965 and through his work, to the chagrin of the rector and the vestry and the community of the Episcopal parish where he and his friends in the Southern Freedom Movement worshipped, he'd gradually help integrate the communion rail of that parish.

Somewhere he had come to know and believe and didn't understand why anyone should be barred from receiving that bread from heaven, the Body and Blood of Christ at the communion rail separate from their brothers and sisters who were a different color than them. He knew hurt, he knew sorrow and he knew he had to do something to make sure that Bread of Life was available to ALL God's children.

On August 14, 1965, Jonathan and Ruby — part of a group of 29 protestors — would go to Fort Deposit, Alabama to picket its whites-only stores. All the protestors were arrested and placed in the jail in the nearby town of Hayneville, AL.

On Friday morning August 20, 1965, Tom would arrive at the court house early in the morning and through his friend the sheriff, be solemnly deputized as a special deputy for the county.

Connie woke up that Friday morning a world away from Alabama in Keene, NH, with an early appointment at the beauticians preparing for her 60th birthday dinner celebration with her friends and a game of bridge that evening.

Around 2pm, on August 20th, Jonathan and Ruby and the other 27 protestors were told they were free to go and released from jail. They had not made plans to be picked up since their release was unexpected. While the coordinator made a call at the pay phone, Jonathan and Ruby and a Catholic priest and another member of the SNCC crossed the street to the Cash Store to buy a soda, as they approached the store deputy Tom stepped out of the store and blocked their way and told them to turn around they weren't welcome there. Jonathan, the Catholic priest, and the other two students continued. Tom raised a shotgun at his side pointing it at Ruby and Jonathan pushed her out of the way and received the the brunt of the blast. Ruby fell down thinking she had been shot. The priest ran and Tom reloaded and shot him in the leg.

Jonathan died at the scene. The Catholic priest survived, as did Ruby and the other student. Tom would be arrested and indicted only later to be acquitted by an all white jury. Ruby Sales would go on to become the public theologian we learned heard about earlier. The Catholic priest would survive and later leave the priesthood and become a city planner with the city of Chicago. Jonathan Myrick Daniels would go on to recognized as a martyr and saint by the Episcopal Church and his feast day would be set aside on August 14th, the day he and his companions arrived in Fort Deposit, AL and were arrested. Connie Daniels learned about the death of her son Jonathan during that bridge game that night. She would go on to celebrate 18 other birthdays, with each subsequent birthday being the anniversary of her son Jonathan's murder. Tom Coleman, the special deputy who murdered Jonathan and attempted to murder the Catholic priest would go on and live nearly another 32 years, dying on June 13, 1997. Between 1965 and his death, he'd quit drinking and start regularly attending church with his wife.

According to Charles W. Eagles in his book, "Outside Agitator", one year after his acquittal, Tom Coleman would tell John Hart of CBS News, "They were down here promoting, antagonizing things, promoting trouble... I wouldn't change a bit. If the same things happens in the morning that happened that day, I would shoot them both tomorrow" and added, "it kept me from getting hurt."

Where does it hurt? Do our neighbors hurt? Do others around us hurt? In our hurt or their hurt does anger arise? Is it an anger that transforms and upbuilds? or is it an anger that seeks only vengeance and destruction and self-preservation? In avenging anger do we or they seek the bread that quickly fades and hunger arises? or do we or they seek that bread of life that satisfies hunger forever, that satisfies thirst forever and transforms and leads to eternal life?

"Oh Absalom, Oh Absalom... Oh God's peace, Oh God's peace, come live through us, come live through us."

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen