

2nd Samuel 5:1-5

Mark 6: 1-6

What Has Nazareth Got to Do with Durant?!

Delivered July 5, 2009

It is really interesting, I think, that the lectionary writers chose to pair our text from Mark, Jesus' rejection at his hometown in Nazareth, with the story from the Old Testament about David's clear, unabashed acceptance by Israel. The contrast is striking, isn't it? And it's even MORE interesting that the lectionary writers chose to pair these two texts since the David story seems to refute or negate the point of the New Testament text. The punch line in the story in Mark is "Prophets are not without honor except in their own hometown." Well, here is David, Israel's hometown boy, being welcomed home like any good war time veteran. The flags are waving, the crowds are going wild. Seems like Jesus has it wrong. Judging by David's welcome, at least SOME prophets receive honor in their own country. But of course, David wasn't really a prophet, was he? And that is key to what the lectionary writers are trying to get us to realize in our two texts for today. And they want us to arrive at that conclusion by doing a character study of the two biblical figures, David and Jesus. They want us to uncover what it is about Jesus that makes him a prophet, and David, well, not so much.

We already know quite a bit about Jesus. We know that he was sent by God to save the world; and that he KNEW things that other people didn't—almost like he intuited things—hence the title prophet. But probably we don't know quite so much about David. So this two-person character study may seem somewhat lopsided. In the time allotted to us, I want us to take a magnifying glass to the lesser known figure, David, the King and unifier of Judah and Israel. After we see what it is that made him so wildly popular among his kith and kin, we'll turn to Jesus for a brief few moments and try to derive why Jesus is so wildly **unpopular** at his home in Nazareth. Then we'll try to wring a message out of these two texts.

If you go to any good study Bible, you'll discover that David lived around 1000 BC. He was born in Bethlehem—remember, that Christmas Carol: The first line goes, Once in royal David's city stood a lowly cattle shed, where a mother laid her baby, etc. etc? The baby Jesus, according to our hymns and traditions, was born in Bethlehem—just like David. That's why Bethlehem is called the **Royal City**. Bethlehem is located in Judah—not in Israel. Keep that in mind. It will become important in just a few minutes.

David grows to manhood and eventually becomes famous as a warrior against the Philistines. His capabilities in war should have been appreciated by King Saul, who was King of Israel; And for a time they were. David becomes so close to Saul in fact that he becomes part of Saul's household—he establishes strong bonds with Jonathan, Saul's son, and even marries Michal, Saul's youngest daughter. Unfortunately, King Saul is intimidated by David. He's paranoid regarding David's growing fame and plots to have him killed. David eventually flees Saul's household and Saul's army in fear of his life. He returns to his home in Judah with a following of loyal troops.

Now, so far in this saga, we can feel sorry for David, right? But in Judah we begin to see another side to David. Turns out David is somewhat of a two timer—giving allegiance to the Philistines in Judah (the heretofore enemy) even as he also maintains an allegiance with King Saul’s army. Then Saul dies on the battlefield leaving a vacuum of leadership in Israel.

This is where we enter the story for today. David has proven himself an able warrior and leader. Although David was born in Bethlehem and Bethlehem is in Judah, not Israel, his wife, Michal is an Israelite. So, since David now has an Israelite bride and since David has proven himself as a skillful warrior, the Israelites claim David as their own. They ask him to be their king.

If we are astute listeners and readers, here is where we begin to wonder if David didn’t marry Michal because he had aspired to the Kingship of Israel all along.. HUM. And maybe Saul was right to be a little paranoid regarding David. Was David so ambitious he would have eventually sold out Saul in order to achieve greatness? What do YOU think? Anyway, David becomes king over both Judah and Israel—the only time in the history of that area, that there has ever been a united kingdom.

It is clear that David was an able warrior, and it is also clear that David was an ABLE, if not totally honest, politician. By ABLE politician, I mean that David tells his subjects what they want to hear and does what his subjects want him to do. In fact, if we flip over just a couple of pages, in 2nd Samuel we read, “All the people took notice of David’s actions, and his actions pleased them. Just as everything David did, pleased all the people.” Such are the actions of politicians. They tend to be people pleasers.

Ok. And now, finally, we are ready to take a brief look at Jesus. Jesus, of course, is NOT a politician. Again, he is a PROPHET. Although the text doesn’t tell us why the townspeople are angry with him, the same story in Luke, gives us little hints. Those hints lead us to believe that Jesus tells the people not what they want to hear, but what they NEED to hear, which is the truth. As the Samaritan woman at the well says of Jesus, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did.” Now I ask you, “Who really wants to hear that?” No wonder the folks at Nazareth have it in for Jesus. He tells them the truth about themselves and after that, they can’t get rid of him fast enough. Again, prophets (as opposed to politicians) are not without honor except in their own hometown.

And this brings us to Cindy Ruhl. As you know, next week Cindy will be moving home to Durant, Oklahoma. This week I did a little research on Oklahoma and specifically on Durant, Oklahoma. Oklahoma and specifically Durant is a mixed bag of good and bad as far as states and towns go. Among the good things I found out this week is that Durant, with a current population of 16,000 is one of the fastest growing areas in the country. And Durant is home to a very successful, growing, university—Southeastern Oklahoma State University (SOSU). Also good news: Commute time in Durant is 16 minutes when the national average is 30 minutes, the cost of living is 26% lower than the rest of the country; and, although I couldn’t find statistics for Durant, the state of

Oklahoma has an unemployment rate that is half the current national average. All of that is very good news for Cindy. Maybe we should all pack up our bags and join you in Durant!

But wait, as I said, Oklahoma and specifically Durant is a mixed bag. That is because the state of Oklahoma and the city, Durant, are not particularly forward thinking--at least, if we are to believe what I read at a Sperlings web site. Sperlings is an online travel guide. It features comments from visitors of the cities and towns it reviews. Regarding Durant, there is only one comment from a visitor and it is a telling one. That one Durant visitor says: "Went to SOSU (Southeastern Oklahoma State University). I was accepted ...on full scholarship. Withdrew from the school after one week. This is the backwoods (exclamation point). I thought I had traveled the time machine and went back to the 1950's (another exclamation point)." The rest is really unfit to read in this place. Suffice it to say, Durant is not exactly New York City, or even Charlottesville, Virginia when it comes to diversity and openmindedness—at least according to this reviewer.

As you probably already know, Cindy, but the rest of us may not, Oklahoma is the western most state in the Bible Belt—Tulsa, Oklahoma often being referred to as the Belt's Buckle. Tulsa is the home of ministries founded by Oral Roberts and Pentecostal preachers like Pappa Hagin" and Billy James Hargis. Along with Kansas, there is a movement in Oklahoma to rid its textbooks of the theory of Darwinian evolution. A few years ago folks got together to create a creationism exhibit at the Tulsa zoo. Finally, there is racism in Oklahoma—I suppose no state in our union is free of that particular sin, but according to what I read, it is more in your face in Oklahoma, than in most other states. In Oklahoma the racism is directed towards African Americans and also towards American Indians. All of which leads me to believe, Cindy, that you are going home to Kansas as a missionary. You studied the Bible at Union Seminary. You have been inspired by great theologians. You have been in Christian ministry in Charlottesville for almost a decade. Now you are going home to minister to the folks in Durant. I suspect that ministry will be extremely challenging.

So, Cindy, I leave you with something to think about as you hammer in your tent stakes in Durant. Are you going to play the role of politician or prophet as you minister to folks in Durant? Will you go back home eager to tell all that you've learned at Union Seminary about the Bible and about Jesus? Will you wow Durantians with your deep insights? Will you impress on them the importance of tolerance and love of neighbor? Or will you play the politician? In other words, will you be a David or a Jesus? My guess is that at first, you will try to be both. You will state your truth quietly and only when in the company of like-minded souls. But I predict there will come a time when you will be tested. I predict there will come a time as there comes a time for all of us, when you will have to decide: Is it David or Jesus with you?

You already know which path you must follow, don't you? When that time comes, I want you to know that there is a congregation of folks, here at Cove, who support you, and love you and who are only a phone call away. Let all the people say. Amen