

11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost; Proper 14B; August 9, 2015

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33; Psalm 130; Ephesians 4:25-5:2; John 6:35, 41-51

Today, we hear David's grief for his son, Absalom, as if the loss happened yesterday. "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom." Who does not understand an unfathomable loss? Grief does not arbitrarily discriminate, or choose its victims capriciously. When we love and lose, we grieve—for the loss of the person and the future without the presence of the one we love. Grief like David's has no timeline, and no "Snap out of it" moment. Grieving takes the time it takes, even when the one we lose is a scoundrel, like Absalom, a fast driving, good-looking party guy with gorgeous hair. Read the whole R rated story. Absalom had issues, yet he remained a child of God, beloved by his father, and David's tears flowed.

It doesn't seem a coincidence to hear David's words today; they echo Ferguson and Michael Brown's blood found on Canfield Drive, and the blood of young black men that continues to flow on streets around our country. Our grief for Ferguson and the greater St. Louis area persists. Those who have lost children remain distraught. Race continues to divide us, and sometimes the sense of helplessness overcomes us.

A year ago today when Ferguson exploded Peter and I were in northern Idaho. From our cabin in the woods, high in the mountains overlooking Lake Pend Oreille, we watched the story unfold on CNN, catching glimpses between walks in the woods and field trips to the lake and beyond. Van Hornes do not vacation in a spot that does not have cable television and Wi-Fi.

Understanding fact versus fiction challenged our grasp of events. The media tells the story in such a way to attract viewers. Christians search for truth in order to find solutions to unjust systems that victimize God's people. We could only sit and wait for the story to develop, and pray for the victims and peace.

Yet, through the contrast between the ugliness of the story and the beauty of the mountains I came to understand more fully how humankind continues to thwart God's plan for creation. During the day deer fed in our back yard, and the scent of pine refreshed the cabin. At night while the full moon cast its reflection upon the lake, we watched violence, looting, shouting and all the rest. It was messy and complicated. Leadership did not show up. St. Louis could no longer hide. Our history caught up with us, and the world saw what happens when years of unaddressed prejudice and discrimination finally unravel. Even a year later we wait for more change for our brothers and sisters who live under different conditions because of skin color, and the lack of so many basic privileges many of us consider to be our entitlement.

Healing begins with caring for others. All of us stand in the presence of God needing forgiveness. Mercifully God redeems us, NOT for our wellbeing alone, but with the intent that we will put away bitterness, wrangling and anger, and extend kindness and forgiveness to one another—here and beyond. God desires us all to live in the beauty of holiness. God expects us to join with the Holy Spirit to put in place systems that will ensure all God's children go to bed with full bellies and get up the following morning to attend good schools. It is not up to us alone to fix unjust systems; we join with others and allow ourselves to be led by God who draws us out of our own concerns to care and feel empathy for the life of the world.

It may mean CHANGE. There is no good way to say this—we have made a difference, we need to do more. We have sisters and brothers who hurt, who hunger, who fall ill with no good care, or live under a bridge or serve an extraordinary prison term for a minor drug offense.

Among clergy circles there is a dread of the summer that falls every three years when once again we deal with the long readings from John's gospel for five Sundays on the same theme, Jesus the Bread of Life, the loaves and fish that feed many, the disciples who do not understand. John Chapter 6.

Yet bread, an ordinary staple of life, has many dimensions. Perhaps it is a metaphor for something so grand we have not yet imagined what Jesus wants us to see and touch, which of course might be why we have to hear the story for 5 weeks.

Jesus is the Bread of Life, and Jesus is the source of Life. Bread is ordinary, found in all cultures, tasty, filling and relatively easy for most to get. Just maybe Jesus challenges us today to see the bread he fed others as more than bread. People need food, but they need more than food. To thrive all God's people need art, music, education, medical care, decent housing, transportation, fair paying jobs and so much more.

Sometimes it is difficult to see that God is at work in the world, but God keeps a busy schedule. We are not here to ask God to come to our aid and help us with our plans to fix the world. As disciples of Jesus we are

called to join with God, to know God and work with God to make the world the way God wants it to be. The work of ministry begins here at God's table with each other.

Sometimes we become impatient. Other times we may lose sight of the kingdom toward which we are headed. Have we become so used to the way things are that we may no longer be able to see how they can be? Those first century folks were stuck in the past, saying things like, "How can Jesus be Bread from Heaven when we know his mom and dad?" Their only frame of reference was ancient stories of manna in the wilderness, which their ancestors complained about. If our whole frame of reference is what magically appeared each morning long ago in the past, we might be confused too. But Jesus' Bread, the Bread of Today will feed us forever.

Like iron drawn to a magnet, God draws us to this mountain bread; Jesus fills us to fill others, to join with God until all God's people have their needs baskets filled, whatever that means for them.

For the life God gives us nourishes all lives and in every generation this gift of life draws us into Jesus' presence where we are fed to feed others; where we understand that until all are fed and nourished with whatever it needs to be, our work with God is not complete. This is the work of ministry that the faithful in every generation hands off to the next.

If David could have substituted his life for the life of his son, Absalom, he would have. No matter how crazy our children sometimes drive us they are the apple of our eyes. We bleed tears when they hurt or we lose them to death.

Yet even the power of King David was impotent in the face of evil. He could not save his son. It would take a God, as Frederick Beuchner said. Our God. The God we worship gave the world a son, a son willing to pay the price for our freedom and well-being. For the freedom and well-being of all. No matter the cost, we are called to do no less for the life of the world.