

The Need for Revolution – Jim Hoffman  
Youth Sunday - August 13, 2006

Curtis, one of our youth, will be reading the scripture passage today from Second Samuel, chapter 6, verses 12-23. You can read along in the bulletins, if you wish.

“It was reported to King David that God had prospered Obed-Edom and his entire household because of the Chest of God. So David thought, “I’ll get that blessing for myself,” and went and brought up the Chest of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David, celebrating extravagantly all the way, with frequent sacrifices of choice bulls. David, ceremonially dressed in priest’s linen, danced with great abandon before God. The whole country was with him as he accompanied the Chest of God with shouts and trumpet blasts. But, as the Chest of God came into the City of David, Michal, Saul’s daughter, happened to be looking out a window. When she saw King David leaping and dancing before God, her heart filled with scorn.

They brought the chest of God and set it in the middle of the tent pavilion that David had pitched for it. Then and there David worshiped, offering burnt offerings and peace offerings. When David had completed the sacrifices of burnt and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the God-of-the-Angel-Armies and handed out to each person in the crowd, men and women alike, a loaf of bread, a date cake, and a raisin cake. Then everyone went home.

David returned home to bless his family. Michal, Saul’s daughter came out to greet him: ‘How wonderfully the king has distinguished himself today - exposing himself to the eyes of the servants’ maids like some burlesque street dancer.’ David replied to Michal, ‘In God’s presence I’ll dance all I want. He chose me over your father and the rest of our family and made me prince over God’s people, over Israel. Oh yes, I’ll dance to God’s glory, more recklessly even than this. And as far as I’m concerned . . . I’ll gladly look like a fool . . . but among these maids you’re so worried about, I’ll be honored no end.’ Michal, Saul’s daughter, was barren the rest of her life.”

Thank you, Curtis. That ends our scripture lesson for this morning. Will you pray with me? Merciful and gracious God, we ask in this moment, as we open our time together in Your Word, that what You have given for us today might resonate in our hearts. We pray that through this time we might open ourselves to You and receive what You have for us today, whatever it is - whether it’s grace, mercy, or learning - we just pray that today we will be receptive to it. We ask this in Christ’s name. Amen.

You probably noticed a little bit of difference between what you read in your bulletin and what Curtis was reading. Actually, I asked that he read the passage from Eugene Peterson’s, The Message, a particular paraphrase of scripture, because our young people tend to read from it more often than from the NRSV, from which came the version I had placed in the bulletin today. You surely couldn’t help but notice some distinction in the words, as you read and listened. I thought I might even have seen a little confusion on your faces as he was reading, and so I wanted to clarify that for you. Speaking of confusion, let’s get into the sermon.

I know that there are many types of writing available for you, and that many of you like different ones. Some of you might like mystery; others prefer the classics, or poetry. I tend to spend a lot of my time invested in reading history books. This year, I had the opportunity to read David

McCullough's work, 1776. Perhaps some of you have read it or, as students of history yourselves, you may know that his work is about the American Revolutionary War - the year 1776, in particular. In this book, he describes some of the dumb luck the Americans had and some of the mistakes the British made which really enabled us to gain our freedom and throw off the tyranny and oppression we experienced under British rule.

When we think of the term "revolution", I believe that we automatically assume something about it – that a certain definition comes to mind. Aristotle wrote in his work, Politics, the 5<sup>th</sup> volume, 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter, these words: "Inferiors revolt in order that they may be equal, and equals that they may be superior. Such is the state of mind which creates revolutions." When we hear the term revolution or revolutionary, it is my contention that we automatically think of casting something off, of overturning the status quo, of making change in such a way that we deny other things.

This morning, I want to go a different direction with that and point us to an alternative view of what it means to have revolution in our lives, in our community of faith. Wendall Phillips was a white abolitionist during the American Civil War who, on January 8, 1852, delivered a speech which I think might help us redefine this term. In his speech, he said, "Revolutions are not made, they come. A revolution is as natural a growth as an oak. It comes out of the past. Its foundations are laid far back." In this oration, though his topic was slavery and racism, which he firmly believed should be discarded from our society, I think he also presented an alternative understanding of revolution – that it is not necessarily casting *off* something, but rather allowing newness to form.

His reference to the mighty oak is perfect, as I'd like to illustrate. If you cut a tree in half and look at it, what do you see? Rings. The rings are like circles, expanding year after year, showing the lifespan of the tree. At the heart of it is the core - the sapling that came into being - but year after year, a revolution took place, adding a new ring to the tree. It didn't do away with its core, it just allowed expansion. It allowed newness to take place. It allowed a revolution to surmount each year and encompass what was the core. I think that is the message for us today and in the weeks to come, as we talk about revolution and the need for it in the church. We're not talking about overthrowing the status quo, but about building upon the core of who we are in such a way that we allow newness to form around and begin to expand who we are.

The scripture passage that we read today is a story of David and how he became revolutionary in his actions. In order to really get a full understanding of the story, however, we need to back up a little bit in the chronology, the history, if you will. You see, the Ark of the Covenant had been captured by the Philistines (1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 5 and 6). They took it off to their home and had it in their possession, leaving Israel without their Ark of blessing for a period of time. What's interesting is that if you read that passage, you'll discover that it wasn't exactly an ark of blessing for the Philistines. As a matter of fact, the Bible tells us that tumors come upon all the people. (For some odd reason, I have this image in my mind of a bunch of buff guys standing around with their Austrian accents looking a lot like Arnold Schwarzenegger saying, "It's not a tumor!" Some of you will probably get that joke from a movie he did once upon a time, but I just had that image in my mind all of a sudden.) Anyway, these guys had to be standing around, saying, "No it can't be! It's blessed! Surely it's got to bless us." But it did nothing but create disease and death for them and so, after having it for seven months, they give it back.

Mind you, they didn't wait for David to come get it from them. They took it back to Israel and gave it to a border community. That community took possession of the Ark of the Covenant, and they

became blessed. So, they sent a messenger off to David and said, “David, we have the Ark back. Do you want it?” He said, “Yes”, and he and a group of men went out to collect it. They loaded up the Ark and began to bring it home. While traveling along the road, the oxen stumbled, the Ark tilted on the cart, and a man named Uzzah put his hand on the Ark. You remember this part of the story, don’t you? God struck him dead. He had touched that which was holy; that which God said should never be touched by human hands. He put his hand up to steady the Ark, and God killed him for it. David was distraught. He was angry with God over this, and decided to leave the Ark at the house of Obed-Edom.

For three months, the Ark stayed in Obed-Edom’s house, blessing the community and the home. David heard about the blessing taking place and, after his time of grieving, he went back out to get the Ark and brought it the rest of the way into Jerusalem. Now his wife, Michal, was watching out the window, expecting David to play “grand marshal of the parade” - to be entering the city as a king would, right? She probably pictured him riding his grand steed, dressed in his royal kingly robes, or riding in his golden chariot, leading the way. But what *did* she see? She saw David dancing in an Ephod linen, a very light priestly robe which, in her mind, surely exposed way too much of him. He was dancing before the Ark as it came in, and she got mad because he wasn’t acting in a way she expected, or in a way with which she was comfortable.

I wonder - in our own community of faith, as people of God, are there lessons we could learn that would move each of us in such a way that we become part of the ever expanding rings of faith in our tree? Are there things that would allow the expansion to take place? I would point us to four things about David mentioned in the passage; things from which we could learn, things which could move each of us toward the revolution that needs to occur, in order to allow new rings to grow upon our tree. The first one is this: David stepped outside of what was believed to be the norm. If we look back to 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 6:16, we see that he moved beyond the boundaries of what was expected of him – well past that which was “kingly” in the minds of the people.

I am reading a book about Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dietrich Bonhoeffer by J. Deotis Roberts, entitled, Bonhoeffer and King: Speaking Truth to Power. In his book, Roberts relates the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and some of the situations in his life that shaped him. One which he chronicled was the invitation Bonhoeffer received to come to Union Theological Seminary on a fellowship in 1930 and 1931. Bonhoeffer left Germany and came to New York City, taking on the fellowship at Union. There, he met a gentleman by the name of Frank Fisher. Frank introduced him to a small Baptist church community in Harlem, and Dietrich began to go to church there and participate in their worship. He listened to the preaching and how it revolved around oppression, racism, and deliverance. He even began to teach Sunday School in this small church. This experience in the African American community in Harlem in the early 1930s began to form and shape who Bonhoeffer was as a person.

At the end of his tenure at Union in 1931, Bonhoeffer went back to Germany. For those of you who know your history, he came home to a time of nationalism - the Nazi party. He arrived to find an anti-Semitic climate replete with the oppression of a people. He watched his fellow church leaders and people of his community of faith simply line up, lock-step, behind Hitler and the Nazi party, and become agents of racism and destruction themselves. He made a very conscious choice to step outside of what had become the norm for clergy in Germany. He joined the Confessing Church movement, and even became part of the small group that plotted to assassinate Hitler. He was arrested and later would lose his life, because he dared to step outside the norm. Now, I’m not

necessarily asking you to “step out of the norm” in the way Bonhoeffer did, but I want you to understand that we need to allow for expressions of faith that may push the edges of what we consider to be the norm. For it is only by “pushing the edges of the envelope”, so to speak, that we will grow.

The second thing David did in the progression of the passages in Second Samuel, was to go and honor God. This is particularly interesting, because if you’ve read Exodus, you will recall the wilderness temple and how it was set up. Once Moses and his compatriots had built the temple, God blessed and ordained Aaron and his lineage to become the priests. They were the ones who went into the temple and served for the people. As the 12 tribes begin to assimilate and come together, the tribe of Levi became the priestly tribe, those who served in the temple. What’s interesting is that David himself, as King of Israel, took on the persona of priest. Recall that the passage says, “David worshiped, offering burnt offerings and peace offerings.” Now some might quickly assume that David was violating priestly principles, but I’ve read several commentaries which indicate that it was not an exclusive practice yet - there was not an exclusive priesthood in Israel at that time.

Frankly, however, that is not really the point I want to argue. The point that I wish to assert is that which Martin Luther attempted to help us understand through his preaching as a 16<sup>th</sup> Century Catholic priest: there is a priesthood of all believers. The “priesthood” is not an exclusive function whereby only the ordained honor God. When we come to worship as a *people* of God, we *all* come as God’s priests - to lift our voices in honor and praise, to give our sacrifices and offerings. What David did was remind us to push our understanding beyond the norm - to allow the acceptance of new forms and expressions of honor and praise, as people give of their time and talents in a variety of ways that may be new to us.

The third thing David did was bless the people. After he honored God, he went out to the community of faith, and he blessed the people. There is a story of a young Jewish woman who was running from the German Gestapo in occupied France. She was being aggressively pursued by them and, as she was trying to get away, she came to the home of a widowed French Huguenot. (The Huguenots are a protestant sect, followers of the teachings of John Calvin, who themselves had been severely persecuted in French history. In fact, most French Huguenots had migrated to other parts of the world, seeking religious freedom and asylum.) So, this young Jewish woman came to the home of one of the small minority of Protestants in France – the home of a Christian woman - and was taken in by her. As she told her tale of pursuit by the Gestapo, and considered how closely they were following her, she became afraid that by being in this woman’s home, she would get her into trouble, too, if she were captured. And yet, this woman made a way for her to escape. She enlisted friends who could help hide the young woman and, in the process of making way for her to leave, she convinced her to swap identification papers. The Huguenot woman gave her identification papers to the young fugitive, taking her documents as her own, knowing that when the Gestapo arrived and read the papers, they would assume her to be the Jewish woman.

The young lady escaped, and later told of the character and love the French woman had shown to a stranger. She expressed profound gratitude for her willingness to take her place - to die for her - and thanked God for the blessing she had received by having met that special person. She became a follower of Christ, and then set out to bless other people - to serve. David, as one who blessed and was blessed, reminds us that we also need to be people who understand that Christ was our sacrifice; that He took our place in such a way that we can be a blessing to others, if we will simply go out.

The fourth thing David did was go home and bless the people in his household. He honored God, he blessed the people, and he went home to bless his family. There's a story about a pastor who had a young son who was dying from a terminal illness. The pastor loved to spend time with his son, reading to him from Scripture. He would pray with him, spend time watching cartoons, have conversations about their favorite subjects, and read him books. One day, as the life was waning away from the young boy, the father, with tears streaming down his face, looked at his son and said, "Are you afraid to meet Jesus?" The little boy looked up at his father and said, "No Dad, not if he's like you."

And so I wonder . . . in the world in which we live, in the occupations we have, in the people we encounter . . . the question comes to mind, who are we blessing? Are we spending our time pursuing comfort and success, anticipating that if we "make it" in the world, we can buy our families all the *things* we hope might provide them comfort, joy, satisfaction, and blessing? Are we pursuing the things of the world, even though we know that what *truly* provides blessing in our homes are the gifts of love, time, and attention? David went home to bless his family. Who will you go home to bless today?

The bottom line is that we need to allow ourselves to broaden our horizons in such a way – perhaps adding a new ring to our own trees - that we come to understand that we need to be blessings to our own families. I don't know about you, but I need to go home today and make some fundamental changes in my life. All in all, when you think about it, what we're trying to avoid is stagnation and death in our tree of life. Brian McLaren put it this way in one of his recent books: "What we're trying to avoid is orthodox narcissism." Now narcissism, as you know, is self-love or egocentrism. From McLaren's perspective, orthodox narcissism is a preoccupation with one set of practices as the "right way" to behave and practice our faith. Really, the lessons from David for us today are meant to help us understand that we can move beyond that kind of thinking - that we can allow new expressions to take place in our community of faith - that we can begin to get beyond just one set practices as the "only way". If we can do this, perhaps our youth will become the new outer rings of who we are as a community of faith, so that we don't wind up falling into the same trap as David's wife, Michal, and become barren. Let us not judge others based only upon our own definition of "who we are", but rather, let us allow God to work in us in such a way that revolution might take place. Let us nurture the new rings which are added to our tree of faith, so that we might continue to grow, as a community of faith, in how we honor God, how we give to the community around us, and how we bless others in our homes. I'm going to ask two of our young revolutionaries to come up for a moment. They are going to share with you the story of their summer experiences, and how God is working in them in such a way that He has crafted newness in each of them. Come, share.

(Youth presenters, Ben Hochsprung, Sally Rymer, and Evelyn Brock speak.) Restore old ruins, rebuild, renovate. Make the communities livable again. This past June, all three of us were blessed with the extraordinary opportunity of going down to New Orleans and helping with the huge process of rebuilding. While we were down there, we certainly weren't living the lives we are accustomed to here in Lee's Summit. In New Orleans, there were a lot of times when we were uncomfortable. The day I was assigned the job of dragging tree limbs to a dumpster was the day that it hit a record temperature in over a century in New Orleans. It was miserable! We also got tasked with scraping mold off the walls so we could paint. I'm not really the kind of person who likes to go scrape mold off of walls, but I had to do it anyway. My most uncomfortable day was probably the day that I was standing on a windowsill for 8 hours scraping paint off of a window. The scraping noise was bad enough, but when you added in the paint remover fumes that were surrounding me the entire day, it was one shell-shattering day! I learned that with God's help, you can complete any task that's

brought before you, whether it be scraping paint or scraping mold. On our trip to New Orleans, we were all forced to leave behind all of the control we had over our lives, and step into a completely new situation where all we could do was trust God. We are blessed with an amazing God who is willing to push us far enough out of our comfort zones that we begin for the first time to truly live. Once we leave behind all those things that we know and all that comfort we have here at home, we have to rely wholly on God, and when we do that, amazing things begin to happen. Through the whole mission trip, God has helped us with amazing things, whether that be overcoming fears or helping us learn things that will guide us through life. As you can see, God makes a revolution with our lives when we let Him break our shell.

(Jim Hoffman returns.) Thank you Ben, Sally, and Evie. What the youth came to do today is say thank you to each and every one of you, for you have been the core of this tree for so long, and yet you have been loving and generous enough to allow them to come around as that newest ring - to allow our tree to continue to grow. I would challenge you to let that continue, even into the many years yet to come, for that's what we are called to be – revolutionary - in all that we are, and all that we do – to be so revolutionary that we welcome that which is to come. Amen?

Will you pray with me, please? Merciful and gracious God, thank You for showing us today the need that we have as a community of faith for a simple reminder that You have called us to live, to continue to grow, and to expand and reach out. We thank You for the youth who have come to participate today in worship, who have come to honor You. We pray that they might have been a blessing to all. Give us Your grace, Your mercy, and Your peace as we go forth this day, keeping us in Your love and Your protection. We ask all of this in Christ's name, Amen.

