



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

July 6, 2014

"The Transforming Power of Friendship" - 1 Samuel 18:1-16 & 20:1-42

The Rev. Dr. Tim Shaw

This summer we're looking at the life of King David. The ups and downs of David's life tell us a lot about what either makes a person's life or breaks a person's life into pieces. The main thing we're thinking about this summer is how to face the giants in our lives. How will we face the overwhelming challenges that inevitably come our way?

Today's text shows us that there is one thing we all must have if we hope to face the challenges of our lives. And that one thing is friendship. The entire narrative of the Bible and the very essence of who our God is, argues that you and I are wired up to go through life with friends.

Okay, I know I may have already lost some of you self-styled rugged individualists. I'm about to lose some of the rest of you when I tell you what this text also teaches us about the nature of the friendships we need.

We're going to meet one of my favorite characters in the entire Bible in this text. He's a gutsy, risk-taking leader who is deeply in tune with God and because he is, he is willing to sacrifice his own hopes and ambitions to ensure that God's will is done in his friend's life and in his nation.

Jonathan, the son of King Saul; Jonathan, the heir to the

throne of Israel gives up his right to be king because he knows that God had called his friend David to that job. And even though that will cost Jonathan a great deal, he will give up his own dreams so that God's dream for his friend and for his nation might become a reality. That's the kind of friend you and I are called to be.

We can't face the giants in our lives and thrive without deep friendships. And the kind of friend you and I need to be is the kind of friend Jonathan was to David.

Through the story of this friendship between Jonathan and David, and in particular the way Jonathan demonstrates his commitment to something greater than his own personal ambition, we get a profound and surprising insight into the friendship heart of God. Jesus called us His friends and we are called to befriend others as Jesus has befriended us. That's where we're headed today.

Do you know who this guy is? (photo of Tim Howard is shown). That's Tim Howard. He was the goalkeeper for Team USA in the World Cup. He had a goalkeeping performance on Tuesday that was unequalled in the last 40-50 years. He blocked 16 shots on goal to keep the Belgians scoreless for most of the game.

Someone went into Wikipedia and changed the article about the U.S. Secretary of Defense and named Tim Howard as the new U.S. Secretary of Defense. Chuck Hagel, the actual U.S. Defense Secretary, called Tim Howard to congratulate him on his amazing athletic performance.

The U.S. lost to Belgium and when Tim Howard was interviewed after the game one of the things that featured prominently in his remarks was his gratitude for his fellow teammates. Speaking of his teammates, he tweeted after the loss to Belgium, "I'm proud to suit up with every one of these guys. It's a tremendous honor to represent this country and it was a ride I'll never forget."

Tim Howard gave an incredible individual performance. And yet, his desire was to make sure that his entire team was built up and affirmed for what they did together. Tim Howard is a follower of Jesus Christ and what he did in the game and after the game is what a good person does when he's given everything that he can give and still his dreams are not fulfilled. Tim Howard was grateful and he was ready to affirm his teammates and not simply draw attention to himself. That's what a good person does. That's the kind of man Jonathan was.

Let's read part of the story of the friendship between Jonathan and David.

1 Samuel 18:1-9: *1 When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. 2 Saul took (David) that day and would not let him return to his father's house. 3 Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. 4 Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. 5 David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him; as a result, Saul set him over the army. And all the people, even the servants of Saul, approved.*

Now here comes trouble.

1 Sam. 18:6 *As they were coming home, when David returned from killing the Philistine (that's Goliath), the women came out of all the towns of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. 7 And the women sang to one another as they made merry, "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands."*

8 *Saul was very angry, for this saying displeased him. He said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands; what more can he have but the kingdom?" 9 So Saul eyed David from that day on.*

King Saul lived a tragic life and at this point in his reign as king we are about to watch him descend into serious mental illness. Saul became so envious of David that he tried to kill David six

times in chapters 18, 19 and 20 of 1 Samuel. Three of those attempts were on the sly. Saul tried to get David into dangerous situations where he hoped that somehow David would be killed.

The other three attempts on David's life were overt. All of sudden Saul would snap while David was just sitting there playing the lute in the court of the king. Saul would suddenly pick up his spear and try to pin David to the wall with it. Saul's envy, his jealousy, and his anxiety slowly ate him alive. Envy will do that to you. It will eat your life away from the inside out.

Jonathan is the son of the King of Israel. It seems that Saul never really wanted to be the king but he will try to hold on to his position of power with everything he has. Saul's story is a tale of misguided, panicky decisions and eventually it's a story of serious mental illness. Saul is a fearful man. His son Jonathan is just the opposite. He's a man of great courage who is loved and respected by his fellow soldiers. Famously, Jonathan, along with his armor bearer, risk their lives to surprise an enemy army and that act of courage results in a great victory for Israel.

Jonathan is the heir to the throne of Israel but he will give all that up because he realizes that God has picked his friend David to be the next king of Israel...not him. Once Jonathan understands that God has called David, he turns his energy to doing everything he possibly can to help David achieve what God has called David to do. Jonathan not only sacrifices any personal ambition he might have had to follow his father, Jonathan proactively supports, encourages and defends David in what God

has called David to do. That will cost Jonathan a lot, but he is willing to make that sacrifice because he can see beyond his own ambitions to the welfare of his friend and his people.

Look at what Jonathan does in the text we just read. He takes off his royal robe and gives it to David. That is an acknowledgment that he knows and accepts that God has a better plan for the nation and that plan involves David being the king and not him. Jonathan gives David his shield, saying I'm going to open myself up to you and trust you. And Jonathan gives David his sword, probably handing it to him, hilt first. He is not going to attack David. In fact, he's going to become David's greatest champion.

If you read chapters 18-20 of 1 Samuel, you'll see, as Eugene Peterson has pointed out, that Jonathan's friendship with David puts a protective barrier around his friend. There is no way David would have survived this insane encounter with Saul without the steady, faithful, sacrificial, covenantal friendship of Jonathan. Their friendship brackets the craziness. It contained the evil. It made it survivable.

We all go through difficulties. Only friendship will get you through those challenges. Why is friendship so important? I love Tim Keller's insight into this. Why is friendship so important? Because it's the way we were designed. If you go all the way back to the beginning of the Bible, to the story of creation, you'll see that God is pretty excited about everything He created. After every day of creation He announces that what He was done was "good" or it was "very good."

It's all-good until He points out the fact that the man He created was all-alone. Even though he's in paradise; even though he has a perfect relationship with God, what does God say about the man? "It is not good that the man is alone." Even though the man seems to have everything that he needs, God says it's not good because he doesn't have a companion, a friend.

God made us to need others, in addition to needing a relationship with Him. Christianity is the only religion that affirms that friendship is at the heart of the universe. There is a friendship between Father, Son and Spirit. That is the central reality of the universe. Friendship is at the core of all that is. Our God is a friendship. And because we are made in the image of God, because we are made like God, we are made for friendship. For those of you who recognize your need for friendship, you're not a weakling. You are living as God created you to live.

If you're a high school student and you're aching inside this summer because some of your friends are headed off to college and it's tearing you up inside—that is evidence that you're living as God designed you to live. It's supposed to hurt when you have to say goodbye to your friends.

Jonathan's friendship with David enables him to survive his unsettling, dangerous encounter with King Saul. You and I need friendships to face the giants in our lives. That's the way God created us.

And the way Jonathan was a friend to David, that is this kind of self-giving love that God wants to see in the friendship between husbands and wives, in the ways

parents love their children, in the ways employers lead their employees, in the way people with power come alongside those who live on the margins in the world.

Jonathan had all the power. He was destined for the throne. He was loved by the people and was a fantastic leader, but he knew that God had a different plan and that plan involved his friend David. So, Jonathan invested everything he had to bless his friend who would be king.

Now, it is at this point that you should be saying to yourself, "Tim, there's no way I can live like that. First, I can't admit to myself or to anyone else that I need friendships. It's too risky. I've been burned to many times. And secondly, in this competitive world, there's no way I can invest myself in others to build them up. I need to project what I've got."

If that's what you're saying to yourself right now, then that is fantastic because you are on the edge of possibly experiencing something new. This Communion Table announces to the world the friendship of God. You and I have a Friend who has loved us with self-giving love. We have a God who has not just taken off His royal robes, He has given Himself so that the world might have life, so that we might become everything God created us to be.

The kind of self-giving love we've been thinking about his morning is embodied in Jesus Christ who gave Himself so that we might become all that God wants us to be. This self-giving love is the genius of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This kind of love has the power to change us and it is this kind of love that we are

called to demonstrate to the world. It is this kind of love that can transform the world.

We are on the receiving end of the proactive, self-sacrificing love of Jesus Christ and because we are, God believes that we can serve, and bless, and affirm, and build-up, and encourage others so that they might become what God wants them to be, even when that costs us a great deal.

This is the way of the cross. This is not the dominant approach to relationships in our culture. This is the way of the gospel and there are no guarantees that we won't be taken advantage of. After all, this kind of love cost Jesus His life. Nevertheless, this is the way we, who have been loved by Christ, are called to live.

You and I need friendships to face the giants in our lives. We were made for friendship by a God who is Himself a friendship. And we were called to be the kind of friend who recognizes what God wants to do in and through someone else...and then we are called to invest our lives so they might become what God wants them to become. And the reason we can admit our need for friendship and be these kinds of friends is because that is the kind of friend Jesus Christ has been to you and me and this is the kind of friend He will be for you and me—forever.

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Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org. The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. It can also be sent to you by e-mail. You may also request the free audio version by visiting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com