



DISABILITY AWARENESS DAY

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

Sunday, November 25, 2012

Luke A. Powery, Lectionary Team Commentator

Lection – 2 Samuel 9:1-13 and Genesis 1:27 (New Revised Standard Version)

2 Samuel 9:1-13

(v. 1) David asked, ‘Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?’ (v. 2) Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and he was summoned to David. The king said to him, ‘Are you Ziba?’ And he said, ‘At your service!’ (v. 3) The king said, ‘Is there anyone remaining of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?’ Ziba said to the king, ‘There remains a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet.’ (v. 4) The king said to him, ‘Where is he?’ Ziba said to the king, ‘He is in the house of Machir son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar.’ (v. 5) Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar. (v. 6) Mephibosheth son of Jonathan son of Saul came to David, and fell on his face and did obeisance. David said, ‘Mephibosheth!’ He answered, ‘I am your servant.’ (v. 7) David said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan; I will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul, and you yourself shall eat at my table always.’ (v. 8) He did obeisance and said, ‘What is your servant, that you should look upon a dead dog such as I am?’ (v. 9) Then the king summoned Saul’s servant Ziba, and said to him, ‘All that belonged to Saul and to all his

house I have given to your master's grandson. (v. 10) You and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him, and shall bring in the produce, so that your master's grandson may have food to eat; but your master's grandson Mephibosheth shall always eat at my table.' Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. (v. 11) Then Ziba said to the king, 'According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so your servant will do.' Mephibosheth ate at David's table, like one of the king's sons. (v. 12) Mephibosheth had a young son whose name was Mica. And all who lived in Ziba's house became Mephibosheth's servants. (v. 13) Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he always ate at the king's table. Now he was lame in both his feet.

Genesis 1:27

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

The emphasis for this special Sunday is that all people are created in the image of God. This Sunday is not really even about "disability" but about those who are "differently abled" and the inability of society to see them that way. This Sunday acknowledges that God's creation can be differently abled but no one is truly dis-abled. People may be different but this does not mean they have to be demonized. On this day, through music, prayers, and sermons, awareness that difference should not cause us to see anyone as "unable" is the key. Teaching this is important. Also, it is an opportunity to show kindness to those who may be ostracized because of their different abilities. Those who are differently abled may feel like they are "dogs" but the Church can be a place of welcome, letting them know that they are valued. The liturgy on this day should include all of the abilities represented in the congregation. Those with different abilities should be invited to take leadership in the service in all ways possible.

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: 2 Samuel 9:1-13 and Genesis 1:27

Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

She's older than I am. In fact, she is one of my oldest cousins. But I've always looked down on her because she was always on the floor looking up. She has no legs that stretch as tall as trees and no able arms that she can use to swat away bees. She doesn't talk like I do or walk like I do but I see her full head of hair and her dark eyes. I see her human smile of love. Yet I'm sure there are those who just call her "crippled" or who see her condition as a result of something that her parents did that was wrong. The real sin is of those who see her as non-human, non-being. The real sin is of those who may call her "retarded" as if God makes mistakes and as if the image of God can only look one way.

My cousin may not have the same abilities that I do but deep in my heart, I know that she is just differently abled. She is not in my image or any other human being's image. But she is created in the image of God. Knowing that stirs humility and awe in me, because God has welcomed her to God's table and to the waters of baptism. Every time her mother bathes her in the baptismal

waters of a bathroom tub and combs her hair with care, she reveals something about how God warmly cares for us no matter who we are.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

In this passage, King David represents a model of God’s care for the so-called “disabled.” Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, grandson of Saul, was not born lame. He was dropped by a nurse (2 Samuel 4:4). This is different from my cousin’s situation in that she was born the way she is. Because of the unfortunate situation of having been dropped, Mephibosheth is “crippled” (v. 3) and referred to as “lame” (v. 13). He has to deal with this the rest of his life. The passage suggests that he has endured a hard-knocks life.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkloYG-SXk&feature=related>

Life is not always smooth sailing. There are bumps, potholes, and sink-holes in the road of human existence. Even when good opportunities come or love is expressed to one who is enduring the jagged edge of life, it is not always easy for them to accept it due to a jaded past. When I met Clackston at an Atlanta church, I didn’t know that was his name at first. When I first approached him and asked him his name, he just said “get out of here, get out of here.” It was a strange greeting but he said this because he had come to believe that was his name since that’s what everybody told him—“get out of here.” He was managing life with mental health issues yet people deemed him non-human. Difference was demonized.

Mephibosheth’s life implies a similar situation because of his physical condition. When David welcomes him, Mephibosheth is shocked and asks, “What is your servant, that you should look upon a dead dog such as I?” (v. 8). He calls himself a “dead dog.” Whether others referred to him as a dog or due to his condition and experience in life, it was an expression of self-hatred; Mephibosheth’s words reveal his struggle in life. He is in disbelief over David’s welcoming reaction to him.

David’s response to him shows that David understood that Mephibosheth was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) regardless of his different abilities. David is not a perfect man, but in this instance, his behavior is exemplary. David seeks to show “kindness” (vv. 1, 3, 7) to someone who is of “the house of Saul” (vv. 1, 3) because of his past relationship to Jonathan, his close friend and a son of Saul. The kindness that David wants to extend is linked to David’s memory of Jonathan, revealing that relational legacies matter and impact the future. In this case, it impacts Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan.

Mephibosheth did not do anything to deserve David’s response, but David’s expression of hospitality is directly tied to the mutual love David and Jonathan had for each other. David is not concerned with what Mephibosheth can give him or what his physical condition is. He just desires to show kindness to him and he does. He welcomes Mephibosheth to eat at the king’s table always (vv. 7, 10, 11, 13). This was a huge privilege (cf. 1 Kings 2:7) because in this way Mephibosheth was treated like a king’s son regardless of his physical state (v. 11). The table was a sign that he was truly “able” though in different ways. He was so able that David gives him everything that belonged to Saul and his whole house (vv. 9-10).

As shown in the movie “Soul Food,” it is at the table where relationships are made right. At David’s table, he shows us how to relate to those who are differently abled. He also shows us that he and Mephibosheth are not only created in the image of God individually but that the image of God is revealed through their communal relationship. In relationality, one sees the image of God. “In the image of God he created them” (Genesis 1:27), one human relating to another human with love and care. When this does not happen and relationships break down, we tarnish the image of God in the world. Thus, as we encounter all of God’s people, even those who are differently abled, may we be like David who was determined to show kindness and acceptance to another.

Celebration

Just as David welcomed Mephibosheth to the table, God has welcomed us. God has shown kindness to us. God has prepared a table for us (Psalm 23). No matter who we are or what we do or can’t do, no matter our (dis)abilities, God says “You can eat at my table! I accept you. You are loved, you are lifted and you are mine!”

Descriptive Details

The descriptive details in this passage include, but are not limited to:

Sounds: David asking to whom he can show kindness; the conversation between Ziba and David; David speaking to Mephibosheth and vice versa; people eating at the king’s table;

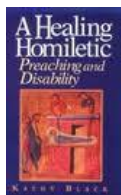
Sights: Ziba going to David after he was summoned; Mephibosheth coming to David and bowing down to him; Mephibosheth eating at the king’s table; the lame feet of Mephibosheth;

Smells: The aroma of the bread, beef, fowl, vegetables, and deserts at the king’s table;

Tastes: The taste of the food at the King’s table; and

Texture: The texture of the soles of the feet of Mephibosheth.

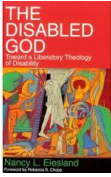
III. Suggested Reading



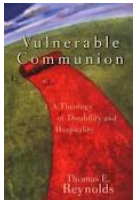
Black, Kathy. A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.



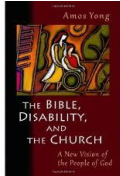
Eisland, Nancy, and Don E. Saliers, eds. Human Disability and the Service of God: Reassessing Religious Practice. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.



Eissland, Nancy. The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.



Reynolds, Thomas E. Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality. Brazos Press, 2008.



Yong, Amos. The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God. GrandRapids: Eerdmans Press, 2011.