

One Vital Question
August 29, 2021
Maple Grove UMC
Rev. Charles Hill

OT-II Sam 15:1-12//Luke 16:19-24//Acts 5:1-6//Philippians 4:8-9

King David was a great leader. He was, without question, the most powerful man in Israel for a long time. He was also richly blessed by a number of very kind biographers. Sometimes that is most important for a great person.

He was: From the tribe of Judah

Born in the town of Bethlehem

Youngest son of Jesse

He was a shepherd boy

He was great as a child: he killed Goliath

He played the lyre, or harp, and was drafted to play for King Saul—to calm him. No Zoloft then.

He was lauded by the citizens. They sang:

“Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands.”

David was made King and

he brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem
and as he did that he danced and had a great time.

He made Jerusalem the seat of government and
was baptized with the Power of God.

And that all adds up to quite a heady resume.

But as he enjoyed one success after another, he apparently had not bothered with that One Vital Question that is on my mind today. At least not on a daily basis.

The King was walking one evening on the palace roof. Roofs were flat in that area of the world. And he was cooling himself at close of a long demanding day. And just over in the next yard Bathsheba was cooling herself with a nice

lukewarm bath. (Now I must admit that I have some trouble evaluating this picture. Could she not see the man on the roof?). Well, you know the rest of the story. He sent a servant to fetch her and he lay with her. And she conceived. And the king said, “Oh, I may have a problem.” **The good king had not considered that One Vital Question. And now he had to think fast. He did. And when his plan was fully carried out Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, was dead. ---And he thought he had saved the day and his reputation. But God was watching. Through the eyes of Nathan. –King David was not above not clearly thinking about consequences.**

He had some of the same problem with parenting. One son, Amnon, abused his half-sister, Tamar, who happened to be Absalom’s full sister. Raped her. *And David did nothing about it. Nothing. So, Absalom waited his chance. And then created the opportunity. And he killed Amnon. Then fled to a nearby area where another king ruled. And he stayed there for three years. And while there he was developing a plan.*

But in all that time the King longed to see his fair-haired son, Absalom. He went on about it until Joab, his general, arranged the homecoming.---Now it would be well that we take a closer look at Absalom here. The author of Second Sam:

Now in all Israel there was no one to be praised so for his beauty as Absalom; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him and when he cut his hair once a year, said hair weighed in at five pounds.” II Sam. v25f

And now this beloved boy was home. David was ecstatic. But Absalom was restless. For he knew he could do a much better job at leading than dear old dad. So, he began **HIS** journey to the throne. ***Except he did not pause to consider that One Vital Question of which I am speaking. He was on a mission, but he had missed something.***

He secured himself some fine horses and a golden chariot and he raced around the city. He also hired fifty strong men to run ahead of him announcing his coming. Yelling about how great Absalom is. You get the picture. And the king did nothing. Absalom would go to the city gate and talk with the elders. He would ask about their needs. They would tell him. He, with a hound dog expression on that perfect countenance would say, "I feel your pain. And if I were king I would take better care of you." But apparently he never asked the question.

So, Absalom attacked his father, and King David went weeping into what is now Jordan I suppose. And he told Joab, the general, be kind to my son, my Absalom. Joab was told Absalom was caught in a tree. The rider reminded Joab what the king had ordered: treat him kindly. And Joab went and found him hanging by his hair (It must have been too early in the spring for him to cut it) and Joab killed right there. And the King wept and wept. Secluded himself and mourned. Until Joab went and told the king to get hold of himself and be grateful to all who had risked their lives to save him. ***Here was the greatest king Israel ever had, and a son that must have looked like a body builder and beautiful to boot. Neither ever paused to ask the question***

And, in the Luken lesson we find the rich man, a farmer, whose land produced and made him rich. He had to expand the barns and grain storage units. He had it all, and he didn't see how his great success should be shared with others. So, he just built and built, until he died. And then he discovered he was not lauded as a great farmer, but denigrated as a miser who didn't see the needs of others. He never asked that One Vital Question.

II. The one vital question that each of us should be asking ourself daily. "If I get to where I'm going, where will I be?" I knew a man once who was elevated to vice president of the company. He went right out and bought a new Audie. But when his next check came, he discovered that the title was not accompanied by cash.—If you get to where you are going where will you be?

Some of us here today can look back and say, “Gee, I wish I had asked that question before I did such and such. —**I am sure Gov. Cuomo wishes that. At least I hope he reflects on it. And some of those people who stormed the capitol on Jan. 6. Someone like Ashli Babbitt who lost her life. “If we get to where we are going today, where will we be?”**

When we moved into Afghanistan 20 years ago to get Osama Ben Laden. And then stayed to establish a democracy. What could go wrong?—Why did the Afghan army lay down its arms? Not because they could not defend themselves. Most of them didn’t really want their women to move toward equality. That’s my take. We could have looked and asked that one vital question in the context of history. And if we had acted on the information of that history we would not be where we are today. If we get to where we are going, where will we be?”

A hundred years ago Dean Campbell and I were hanging out along the Muskingum River in Beverly. There was a rope attached to a tree limb. Dean shed his clothes, grabbed the rope, swung out over the water and dropped. When he came up he said, “Come on in the water great.” One problem. I couldn’t swim. I did ask the Vital Question, and I said, “No, can’t do that.” ***If you get to where you are going, where will you be?”***

That is the question the once-up-on-a-time **UNITED** Methodist Church has been dealing with for the past thirty years. And now we know. We will probably splinter when the General Conference meets. Yet, we should ask, “if we get to where we are going is it possible for us to do some of Christ’s work together? Can we join hands on some issues? Or will we denounce each other? We are told that the Pension Board will remain one. And I am for that. If we split, just how much can we still do together? Jesus pleads with us to address that question in a positive manner. “If we get to ‘splitsville’ can we still be Christian and do Christ’s work and relate to each other in love?”

And what about our nation: ***“If we in America get to where we are going at the moment, where will WE be?”*** If we get to where we are going on:

Global Warming—this is a matter of life and death. If we do nothing, it will be addressed. Millions will die, the human footprint will lessen, balance will return in a thousand years, and all will be well.

White supremacy--- When Obama was elected president, I thought, “We have arrived.” The Supreme Court thought so too. But remember, they thought slavery was all right too. What Obama’s election did was to show us how racist we are. If we continue the path of White Supremacy, where will we be?

Guns in the streets ---If we continue not to address this issue where will we be? I need not elaborate on this issue. You read the paper or watch the news. You know there is a problem that sooner or later has to be addressed.

Where will we be if we continue to ignore the crucifixion of Truth on the Cross of Expediency? We will not be a democracy for long.

I am aware that we, a few hundred committed Christians cannot change the world overnight. We can, however, be guided by the Spirit of Christ, who will empower us to resist evil, overcome prejudice, expand our ability to show compassion to all people, to have empathy even for those who bug us. Listen to Paul:

*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is **true**, whatever is **honorable**, whatever is **just**, whatever is **pure**, whatever is **lovely**, whatever is **gracious**, if there is any **excellence**, if there is anything worthy of **praise**, think about these things.*

I would say, We need to let our daily behavior be baptized in these holy attributes. These marks of virtue. These acts of grace which are empowered by the Presence of Christ in our lives.

The world is in a mess. America is conflicted but Christ's Spirit can still open our eyes to truth, open our minds to Christian acceptance of others, open our hands to help; insure, that as we move along this highway of faith we can get to where we need to go; to the place where Christ is calling us to be.

So, from this moment: will you covenant with Christ to:

Take global warming seriously?

To lay aside any idea that being white makes one better than anyone of color.

To work with those who seriously are trying to do something positive about gun violence in this community and the land?

To get serious about truthfulness everywhere?

Pledge yourself to denounce lies no matter who is lying?

**Will you, with God's help, make the Golden Rule, the touch stone of your relational behavior? "Do unto other as you would have others do to you?"
Let's pray.**