

## *JONATHAN LOVED DAVID*

Ruth 1.15-19 & I Samuel 18.1-5

June 24, 2018, Pride Sunday

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### **Ruth 1:15-18**

15 So she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.' <sup>16</sup>But Ruth said,

'Do not press me to leave you  
or to turn back from following you!

Where you go, I will go;  
where you lodge, I will lodge;  
your people shall be my people,  
and your God my God.

<sup>17</sup> Where you die, I will die—  
there will I be buried.

May the LORD do thus and so to me,  
and more as well,  
if even death parts me from you!'

<sup>18</sup>When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

### **1 Samuel 18.1-16**

**18**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. <sup>2</sup>Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. <sup>3</sup>Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. <sup>4</sup>Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armour, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.

<sup>5</sup>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.

## Sermon: Jonathan Loved David

They tell me it is bad form to begin with an apology. But if that's the case, I will have to apologize for apologizing.

If the sermon seems a little confusing this morning, if feels a little jumbled, a little unresolved, it is because I am.

I had a plan. For these three weeks, as the Lectionary advises, churches like ours would be thinking together about these stories in I Samuel.

So we started with I Samuel 3 and the young Samuel learning about showing up. He might not know who or what is calling him. He might not know what to do when he gets there. But he keeps saying: "Here, I am!" He shows up anyway. And that's important because: Never underestimate the power of showing up.

Last Sunday Samuel grieves over the king he has anointed – Saul. But he does what God asks of him anyway. He anoints young David to be king, which is an act of revolution because Israel already has a king: "You anoint my head with oil" Psalm 23 says, and because of that, David knows not only the green pastures of his shepherding days but the valley of the shadow of death when he is on the run as an outlaw.

Samuel is part of that complex web of relationships that is parenting a revolution. And that includes us – all of us – if we have any hope of raising children to change the world.

The world will change anyway so we might want to contribute to a change in direction toward greater love and justice.

And the plan was that on this Sunday – Pride Sunday – we would read together I Samuel 18 along with its companion story in Ruth 1. You have already heard Ruth 1. Here is I Samuel 18:

18When 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.

<sup>2</sup>Saul took David that day and would not let him return [home] to his father's house. <sup>3</sup>Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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.

Whatever people say about the Bible and sexual orientation or gender identity, they have to contend with these two biblical love stories beyond orientation or gender or social expectations.

And I had the perfect resource: Bible scholar Tom Horner's *Jonathan Loved David*, published all the way back in 1978, and demonstrating that the stories of Jonathan and David and Ruth and Naomi share a common language and a common historical context with other stories about same-sex love.

It was perfect for Pride Sunday!

And the frosting on the cake was to retrieve that image on the cover of your bulletin from December about five and a half year ago when we married 25 same-sex couples in this sanctuary.

Just to be clear, we had been marrying same-sex couples for over 30 years but it took the State that long to catch up with us.

That was the plan – this image and those biblical stories for Pride Sunday.

And then those *other* images started coming in. Photos of children being separated from their parents. Babies in cages. Teenagers lined up at airports like inmates in the middle of the night.

And I know. This is not the first time children of color have been forcibly taken from their parents. I know that this is not the first time people of color have been locked up in cages. And I know that images can be manipulated and misidentified.

But my confusion this morning – the thing that totally derailed my perfect plan – was trying to find some way, in my own mind, to reconcile the image of 25 beautiful couples being lawfully united in marriage and the images of those beautiful children and their families being separated; being torn apart.

How can we make sense of those two realities today?

I don't know. I do know that I cannot, this morning, acknowledge one image without acknowledging the other. They are jarring. One image celebrating the uniting of families and the other the horror of separating them.

As a congregation, we know something about this.

We defended Chinese immigrants when mobs were trying to force them back on their boats in Elliot Bay.

We defended Japanese-Americans against the executive order that put them in the cages of the internment camps.

Out of the experience and the loss of a young gay man we sing “Bring Us Home” with tears in our eyes because we know deep in our hearts that there is no place like home – even if we haven't been there yet. We know that all kinds of people for all kinds of reasons have been scattered – separated from home. We know what the longing for that kind of family that is the place of our belonging.

So don't quote to us Romans 13 about obeying the government. Don't quote Leviticus 18.22 that men lying with men is an abomination.

We tell the story about Ruth promising Naomi:

*Where you go, I will go;*

*Where you lodge, I will lodge – we are making a new home.*

*Your people shall be my people - we are creating a new family.*

*May God do to me whatever God will*

*if anything but death separates me from you – that's Ruth's vow about home as the place where she will never be separated from the one she loves.*

We tell the story about Jonathan loving David as his own soul. And the story says that Saul “took David that day and would not let him return home to his father's house.” David was separated from his family.

And, imagine David living in the king's house and having to hide the truth about himself – that he had secretly been anointed king, that he was in love with Jonathan, that he would never – could never – go home again. Think of that when you read the ending of Psalm 23. This one anointed to carry out a revolution says: “Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will live in *God's house* forever.”

David knew about separation and family and a larger definition of home.

There is a poem by Warsan Shire that has been going around. Warsan is a British-Somali poet and she tries to wake us up to the confusing, jarring experience of separation and family and home. Her poem says in part:

*you have to understand,*

*that no one puts their children in a boat*

*unless the water is safer than the land*

*no one burns their palms*

*under trains*

*beneath carriages*

*no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck*

*feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled*

*means something more than journey.*

*no one crawls under fences  
no one wants to be beaten  
pitied*

*no one chooses refugee camps  
or strip searches where your  
body is left aching  
or prison ...*

*i want to go home,  
but home is the mouth of a shark  
home is the barrel of the gun*

*and no one would leave home  
unless home chased you to the shore  
unless home told you  
to quicken your legs  
leave your clothes behind  
crawl through the desert  
wade through the oceans  
drown  
save  
be hunger  
beg*

*forget pride  
your survival is more important*

*no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear  
saying-  
leave,  
run away from me now  
i dont know what i've become  
but i know that anywhere  
is safer than here*

Beloved ones, this Pride Sunday is complicated and confusing because leaving home and longing for it can all get wrapped up together.

And some of you don't have any trouble imaging this. You have your own stories of rejection and separation and leaving one home behind in hopes of finding a new one. You know the pain of home chasing you away and the courage it takes to find – or make – a new one.

So, I apologize this morning for not being able to straighten all out; to make sense of the jarring images of this day – competing pictures of pride and celebration on the one hand and terror and shame on the other. I'm sorry I can't wrap it all up in some nice, neat rainbow-colored package. I wish I could.

I can say this. We never thought; we never dared to believe; we were told not even to imagine that, in our lifetime, 25 same-sex couples would be legally married in this sanctuary.

We have photographic evidence of the power that is already at work within us to accomplish far more than any of us could ask or imagine.

So we can sing “We Shall Overcome” this morning because we have seen it.

And we sing it this morning because there is much more overcoming yet to be done.

On this Pride Sunday, “We Shall Overcome” is, at the same time, a song of celebration and a song of commitment.

It's a song calling us to show up.

We may not know who or what is calling us.

We may not know exactly what to do when we get there.

But show up anyway because ...

Never underestimate the power of showing up.

And thank God.

In the confusion, with the jarring images, with all the mixed messages of this day, you showed up to sing one more time, “We Shall Overcome.”

And today, as we sing, if you hear that voice calling you to show up all over again, do not harden your hearts.

#### NOTES

Tom Horner, *Jonathan Loved David* (The Westminster Press, 1978). There are many good resources on the Bible and sexual orientation that have been published since Horner’s book. But his contextual work demonstrates the scholarship that was being done 40 years ago. The full Warsan Shire poem can be found at [www.genius.com/Warsan-shire-home](http://www.genius.com/Warsan-shire-home). What appears here is an excerpt.