

“Mephibosheth – A Place for the Broken”

March 22, 2020

A Place at the Table series – 4th Sunday in Lent – Livestream

Last week, we shared a quote on our Facebook page from Rev. Eston Williams: “At the end of the day, I’d rather be excluded for who I include, than included for who I exclude.” That’s a powerful word as we engage with these stories that remind us of God’s inclusive love for the world. In a time when everyone in the world is facing fear together and seeking hope together, remembering that we’re all beloved children of God is vital.

I’ve found myself thinking about the importance of perspective, too. I know that I take a lot for granted. Simple things like being able to go to the store and buy whatever I need when I need it (or probably more accurately – buy whatever I want when I want it!), clean water, a stocked pantry and refrigerator, meaningful work, health insurance and access to medical care. I know that I take the gift of faith for granted sometimes, too. It’s even easier to see these days, and it’s something I need to remember later on.

This story of grace reminds me of God whom I claim and worship, especially in times like this. I believe in God who is with us no matter what. I believe in God who travels the difficult journey with us. I believe in God who doesn’t ever leave us or forsake us, even when we turn away and grieve God’s heart. I believe that God’s love is the strongest force there is in this world – and that we’re a part of making that force known every day. I believe in God whose grace is amazing.

I wonder how Mephibosheth would describe God if we could ask him. I wonder what he would say about grace – God’s love that we don’t earn or deserve – but that love that’s a free gift to us. I wonder what he’d say about experiencing the unexpected welcome from King David. How did it feel to be welcomed and included at the table?

That’s what Mephibosheth experienced – kindness instead of cruelty, hospitality instead of exclusion. Mephibosheth is not a name we know well. No, he doesn’t get a lot of attention. No, it’s not easy to pronounce his name, nor has it made the Top Ten Baby Names ever. But, Mephibosheth is someone we should know.

It all started long before he came to be around King David’s table. Remember the story of David and Goliath? When young David took down the giant Philistine with a stone, King Saul was impressed. He brought David into his kingdom, and David and King Saul’s son, Jonathan, become close friends. They made a covenant of friendship with each other - and a promise to take care of one another – and even extended that promise into the future and their families. Jonathan even protected David when Saul was threatening him.

The Hebrew word for this loving-kindness that Jonathan shows to David is *hesed*. It's the way that God's love is described in relationship to humanity throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. God shows *hesed* – loving-kindness – to God's people.

When Jonathan and King Saul both die, Jonathan leaves behind a young son, Mephibosheth. His caregiver drops him in a hurry when she hears that King Saul and Jonathan are dead. As a result, Mephibosheth sustains injuries and a permanent disability. So this grandson of King Saul and son of Jonathan is cast aside by the community. In the eyes of the world at the time, Mephibosheth is broken. He is lame. His disability is cause for ill treatment and probably isolation. He doesn't stay with family, but is sent away.

It isn't until King David is looking for Jonathan's family that he discovers Mephibosheth. David wants to show loving-kindness to Jonathan's family as he promised to do, even though his relationship with Saul was very strained.

So this is more than just a story about a man who gets invited to the king's table. It's also a story about the need for reconciliation and forgiveness in broken relationships. The covenant between David and Jonathan was strong, but so many times, the fights and feuds we have affect other relationships. We hold grudges. We make and keep enemies. And those tensions are never resolved. Conflicts linger.

Saul and David were rivals, and David was usually on the run from Saul. How could David possibly maintain that connection with Jonathan? If we're honest, wouldn't we want to just be done with it? Have we ever written off someone because of their relationship to someone we don't like or who doesn't like us? Do we know examples – maybe even in our own lives and families – where we've allowed conflict to affect generation after generation?

But David's loyalty to Jonathan – and his friendship with him – drives him to keep his promises. David extends the grace he experienced from Jonathan, and it's grounded in God's loving-kindness to David himself.

And notice how David uses his power for good. David has all of the power; Mephibosheth has none. Mephibosheth – who could have been considered an enemy – becomes like David's own family. Someone cast aside and forgotten becomes known and honored. Mephibosheth isn't simply invited into the palace, but also into David's home and to his table. He's given a permanent place, not just a temporary stay.

And the table is an intimate place. Sharing a meal together brings us closer. And in these days when our tables may be used a lot more – eating more meals together, working and learning at home, playing games, or just sitting and talking – I pray that we notice how much it means to have a place at the table - a place of connection when

we're accepted and included. We pray for those who don't feel connected or accepted or included.

That's really the call for us – to allow grace to rule our hearts more than anything else and to make space for each other. I know it's a strange word in a time of physical distancing, but an important one as we consider who we see around us and who we don't see. Who doesn't have a place?

Mephibosheth reminded me of a neighbor I had growing up. His name was Dylan, and he had a physical disability. But that wasn't all about him. He was funny, kind, loved to play games, and loved to talk just like anyone.

When we think about Mephibosheth, how do we treat those who have a physical disability? That may be something we can see. How do we extend the grace that we've been given? Do we simply see a disability and what someone isn't able to do, or do we see all of their abilities and the gifts they have?

There are other struggles that we can't see like chronic pain or other illnesses. Even as we gather to worship today, I invite us to consider how we can care for the most vulnerable in our world. Staying home and doing what we can do is an important act of care. We're all have a part in creating a community of belonging.

Mephibosheth is a name we know and someone we relate to because he's an example of restoration and hope. As we pray for one another, as we pray for our world, we lift up God's grace for us and for everyone. We lift up God's care and God's call to us to care.

I invite us to see a picture based on Jesus' words in Luke 14 (**SHOW SLIDE**). Jesus offers a parable where the host of a great banquet invites his guests, but they're too busy to respond, so he sends his servants to invite those who are usually not invited and opens his table to them. This is a powerful depiction and reminder for us that everyone has a place at the table.

So what will we do? How will we welcome? How will we get beyond what we see and see more than what's in front of us – to see the blessing and gift of one another?

There's a place at the table for the one who has been out of sight – and even out of mind. There's a space at the table for the one who feels sidelined because of a disability. There's a place for the one who feels like they don't deserve it. Thankfully, God's love isn't based on our earning or deserving anything. It's based on this gift of grace that God gives freely – and that all of us can receive.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

I invite us to hear a song called "Carbon Ribs" that Michael will share.