

A Leader for God's People

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10

¹ Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Look, we are your bone and flesh. ² For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The LORD said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel." ³ So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. ⁴ David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. ⁵ At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years...

⁹ David occupied the stronghold and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inward. ¹⁰ And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him.

This past week I have the opportunity to interview and hire a new manager for a project I direct for Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit, my other job. It is challenging and exciting to bring on new talent or promote someone who is showing great promise. The thing I hope is that we have selected the right person to do the tasks required.

As we look back on history and envision possibilities for the future, we recall significant political, religious, social, and economic leaders who have influenced our world and our life on the planet. Some of these leaders have been visionary, creative, and liberating; others have been oppressive, intolerant, and hurtful. One point becomes clear, however: to lead and to lead well are not easy tasks. **Carol J. Dempsey, Op**

This passage from Samuel seems like just another crowning of another king, but it is a shift in the tectonic plates of history, particularly for the people of God. To understand the profound impact of what is being relayed in these brief seven verses, we need to wade through the brutal tides of tribal warfare and vengeful murders and plots that have preceded this passage. The background context of this little note about David making a covenant with the tribes of Israel is years of bloody battles in which brothers and cousins beheaded and dismembered one another. From the early verses of the biblical narrative, we remember that Israel longs to be a united and strong nation

and asks God to provide them with a king. The king they are given is Saul, who both fails to be faithful to God and grows paranoid in response to young David's military success and popularity. Saul orders David to be murdered, and David flees for his life, taking some 400 people with him. More battles ensue. There are battles with neighboring kingdoms, and David is caught in the middle. Throughout the ordeal David continues to show respect for King Saul and honor for God. Imagine decades of civil-war battles or a generation of gang executions finally coming to an end, and you can begin to see the importance of this passage.

Whatever it is that leads them to Hebron, they cry out with one voice for peace, and all the tribes, both those of Israel and those of Judah, ask David to reign as their king. This is the healing of nations. It is the healing of the people of God as a whole. It is also the healing of David the exile, whose life was threatened. The passage offers testimony to the power of God to make a way when there seems no way, and to offer a peace that passes understanding. In a world that continues to seem much more prone to fragmentation, it is a miracle of unification. Our imaginations are challenged to find a modern parallel to this act of peacemaking. It calls to mind Nelson Mandela emerging from twenty-seven years of prison to lead the nation of South Africa to a multiracial democracy. It testifies to the possibility that, despite all appearances to the contrary, peace may come in the Middle East or in any war-torn part of the world. Our God is a God of reconciliation and healing, and the reuniting of the tribes of Israel is proof that even after generations of bloodshed peace can be achieved. **Liz Barrington Forney**

Our narrative establishes David as king of all Israel. David was "set up" by God to be a leader, to be king over Israel. The youngest of Jesse's sons, David was chosen by God, anointed by Samuel (1 Sam. 16:11-13), David's rise to power was a tumultuous time during which David and his followers struggled with the successors of Saul for control over the territory and populace that had formed Saul's kingdom before his premature death in battle. Earlier, David was anointed king over Judah (2:4a); now gets a promotion and he is called to be king over Israel's northern tribes and those who

had been loyal to King Saul. They acknowledged the fact that even though Saul was king of Israel before David, David was really the one leading the people. The people of Israel also acknowledged that God had chosen David to be their next leader. As a sign of their affirmation of David, they anointed him themselves, but only after he had entered into covenant with Israel's elders, who represented the tribes at large. Once a shepherd of sheep (1 Sam. 16:11), David had now become a shepherd of God's people (2 Sam. 5:2). This consolidates David's rule as king over all the tribes of Israel and joins them together in the person of their leader.

Thus, David embodied many of the virtues and qualities we would hope to find in leaders today, as the world community struggles to live in peace with a vision of the common good that is more a hope and a dream than a lived reality.

David's rise and elevation to the throne began improbably. The eighth son of Jesse, a shepherd boy (1 Sam. 16:11; 17:15), he now is to be "shepherd of my people Israel" (2 Sam. 5:2). He comes to this point by the will of the God of Israel, expressed here through the voice of the people. The bond between David and the people is described in images reminiscent of the deep relationship between man and woman in the Genesis creation story (Gen. 2:18-24). The people say, "Look, we are your bone and flesh" (v. 1). So, this establishes David as truly "one of us," in the eyes of the people he will govern.

The appeal to David to be king, coming from the people, hearkened to his relation of kinship with the people (v. 1); to what he did for the tribes while Saul was king—leading them and bringing them along as their military leader (v. 2a; 1 Sam. 18:13, 16); and then to God's promise that David will be "shepherd of my people Israel" and "shall be ruler over Israel" (v. 2b). These form the basis for David's ascension. His first act as king is to establish a covenant with the people at Hebron (v. 3a). Then David is anointed king over Israel (v. 3b).

The new king then makes a military move against the Jebusite city of Jerusalem. Since Jerusalem had not belonged to any tribe, David shrewdly made it his seat of

governance in a move to counter charges of favoritism toward any one tribe and to transcend local and regional tribal politics. The city is taken; and the "stronghold of Zion" is renamed "the city of David" (vv. 7, 9).

David is a key Old Testament figure; his long reign as Israel's premier king also establishes the lineage through which the even greater king, Jesus Christ, emerges (Matt. 1:1-17; Luke 2:4). David's anointing is vital to Israel's hope as a nation and, ultimately, to God's covenantal purposes in establishing Israel from the initial covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). In his day, King David called the people to remain faithful to covenant and The Law. David knew his success would rest on a dynamic relationship with his God (2 Sam. 5:10). David and God were in covenant together (2 Sam. 7:1-17), and David was first and foremost a person of prayer, who sought divine guidance and God's blessing (2 Sam. 7:18-29).

Like David, Jesus is an "improbable" leader, who is indeed "the savior of the world" (John 4:42). He too is from lowly circumstances and not one most would expect to be God incarnate, come to earth for the purposes of salvation.

Both David and Jesus indicate the newness of what God is doing. In David, God is establishing a line to lead the covenant people. In Jesus, God is establishing the relationship of love and grace that reconciles the world to its creator (2 Cor. 5:16-21).

As we ponder this image of shepherd in relationship to leadership, what exactly was a shepherd's "job description" in the ancient world? To begin, a shepherd had the task of caring for the physical needs of the sheep, especially if the sheep were injured in any way. The shepherd had to protect the sheep against predators. As a guide and constant companion of the sheep, a shepherd also had to exert authority and leadership. Inseparable from the flock, the shepherd's work was often demanding, solitary, rewarding, but also challenging (Gen. 31:40; 1 Sam. 17:34-35). Thus, the story of David provides us with a vision of leadership that is strong and benevolent, assertive and godly.

Three aspects of this David story stand out in relationship to Jesus Christ as leader and savior:

David and Jesus are the shepherds of the people. David is transformed from shepherd boy to shepherd of God's people, Israel (v. 2). The shepherd image was used for political leaders and kings in the ancient Near East. It connotes the responsibility to care for and protect the people, as a shepherd. Jesus Christ, as incomparably greater than David, is "the good shepherd" who knows and is known by his sheep and who lays down his life for them (John 10:11-14). The image of the shepherd is an enduring one, as in the beloved Psalm 23 (a "Psalm of David"). It points to the care of God, now in Jesus Christ, for God's people. It is a care more comprehensive and deep than any human shepherd—even David—can give.

David and Jesus are covenant leaders. David's anointing is accompanied by his making a covenant with the people (v. 3). His political leadership is to be grounded in the relationship God establishes with Israel, expressed in covenants. As king, David's rule is to reflect the vision God will establish, and in his covenant with the people, David commits to acknowledging God's ultimate rule. David is to realize that he rules "for the sake of... Israel" (v. 12).

In Jesus Christ, God's "new covenant" is established (1 Cor. 11:23-26). He is the fulfillment and culmination of all God's covenants. He is the vision of God's intended desire for the world and God's people, in person. Jesus Christ is God's new covenant in himself. God's covenant in Christ is a covenant with the world, grounded not in a human king, but in the initiator of all covenants, even God.

Both David and Jesus show God is with us. David becomes greater and greater, since God is with him (v. 10). This epitomizes the best dimension of his kingship, his relationship with God, which is to undergird all he does. David's own history in his sinfulness shows his weaknesses and how his sense of following God's will is clouded at times when he lives in disobedience. Nevertheless, David follows God "with all his heart" (1 Kgs. 14:8; 15:3).

This assessment of David could be said of all of us. What is most true for us should be that God is with us. We fail. We sin. Nevertheless, our hearts should be centered on following God with all that is within us. Jesus is our primary model, as one who maintains faithfulness to God's will in all things, without sin. Like David, we will need to seek forgiveness. Through Jesus Christ, this forgiveness is available. In him, we experience that God is with us. **Donald K. Mckim**

Today, we acknowledge the fact all people are gifted and empowered but may not have the opportunities to have their gifts acknowledged and used, their power liberated, and their voice heard. The shepherd imagery does, call us to examine our leaders today. Are our leaders today really in tune with all the people whom they govern? Do they see power as a gift to be used to bring all people, all life, into the fullness of being where power is shared, mutuality is esteemed, and diversity is celebrated?

Many of our leaders today profess some sort of religious belief—whether Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, or some other faith—but are they caught up by the transformative Spirit of that Sacred Presence whom we have called by many names? David set the bar; the prophets who came after him raised it (Isa. 9:1-7; 11:1-9; 42:1-9; 49:1-7). The biblical tradition calls us all to be "light." Dare we live our vocation and lead accordingly, while mentoring a new generation that must take us into the way of peace? **Carol J. Dempsey, Op**

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