

“Where Is the Wisdom From?
St. Paul’s United Church of Christ
July 4, 2021

Friends in Christ...

Today, America is celebrating the Fourth of July—also known as Independence Day. It has been a federal holiday since 1941, but the tradition of Independence Day celebrations goes back to the 18th century and the American Revolution. On July 2nd, 1776, the Continental Congress voted in favor of independence, and two days later delegates from the 13 colonies adopted the Declaration of Independence, a historic document drafted by Thomas Jefferson. From 1776 to the present day, July 4th has been celebrated as the birth of American independence, with festivities ranging from fireworks, parades and concerts to more casual family gatherings and barbecues.

The colonies started the process of transition to become a new nation going from British rule. The Old Testament lesson for today from Second Samuel is a part of the transition from a group of tribes to a central government. The first king, Saul, was followed by his son Ishbosheth as king. After he was killed (not by David), David became king, first of Judah and then all of the United Kingdom. From Chapter 5:

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10 (CEB)

David becomes king of Israel and Judah

5 All the Israelite tribes came to David at Hebron and said, “Listen: We are your very own flesh and bone. ²In the past, when Saul ruled over us, you were the one who led Israel out to war and back. What’s more, the LORD told you, You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will be Israel’s leader.

³So all the Israelite elders came to the king at Hebron. King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel.

⁴David was 30 years old when he became king, and he ruled for forty years. ⁵He ruled over Judah for seven and a half years in Hebron. He ruled thirty-three years over all Israel and Judah in Jerusalem.

⁹David occupied the fortress, so it was renamed David’s City. David built a city around it from the earthen terraces inward. ¹⁰David grew increasingly powerful, and the LORD of heavenly forces was with him.

The lectionary skips verses 6 through 8 where it tells of David and his troops attacking and defeating the Jebusites at Jerusalem to take control of the city.

Stan Mast writes that this is a little text, but it is the exclamation point of the whole David story. David gets everything God promised him, and then some. The

boy whom we first met when he was shepherding his father's flock becomes the King of Israel, the shepherd of God's flock. And he establishes Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel. It will become the locus of God's saving activity and the focus of the biblical hope.

But it wasn't easy getting here. After the deaths of David's worst enemy, the mad king Saul, and David's closest friend, the beloved Jonathan, there were 7 and ½ years of bloodshed and treachery and sorrow. When Saul and Jonathan were killed in battle, a fierce civil war broke out between David and the house of Saul, that is, between Judah in the south and the rest of Israel in the north, as represented by the generals Joab and Abner. The house of Saul refused to cede the throne to its God anointed successor and instead put Saul's son, Ish-bosheth, on the throne. It was not a peaceful transfer of power, but, as the ensuing chapters point out, that wasn't David's fault.

Oh, yes, David was involved in the civil war, but he never shed innocent blood. That is, he was innocent of bloodguilt. The writer of the story takes great pains to establish David's innocence in this respect. As the war progressed, David's side got stronger, while Saul's got weaker. Finally, the great general Abner (on Saul's side) defected to David's side after being falsely accused of sexual misconduct by Ish-Bosheth. Abner brought much of the northern kingdom with him.

This is the exclamation point of the great story of covenant faithfulness by both the man David and the God of Israel. David was a man after God's own heart who remained faithful to God through all the impulses and damages of his bloody history (until that awful affair with Bathsheba, which would have dreadful consequences for David's family and for all Israel). And the God of Israel was faithful to his promises to David. That mixture of human responsibility and divine sovereignty, of performance and promise, of sin and grace is the story of God's people throughout history. From this we are reminded that our faithfulness matters, but God's faithfulness matters more, because in the end, it's all grace.

We see that David received wisdom from God, though he did not always use it wisely. Where did Jesus get his wisdom is a question asked in our reading from the sixth Chapter of Mark where we have two stories of Jesus:

Mark 6:1-13 (CEB)

Jesus left that place and came to his hometown. His disciples followed him. ²On the Sabbath, he began to teach in the synagogue. Many who heard him were surprised. "Where did this man get all this? What's this wisdom he's been given? What about the powerful acts accomplished through him? ³Is not this the carpenter? Is not he Mary's son and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? Are not his sisters here with us?" They were repulsed by him and fell into sin.

⁴Jesus said to them, “Prophets are honored everywhere except in their own hometowns, among their relatives, and in their own households.” ⁵He was unable to do any miracles there, except that he placed his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶He was appalled by their disbelief.

Sending out the disciples

Then Jesus traveled through the surrounding villages teaching.

⁷He called for the Twelve and sent them out in pairs. He gave them authority over unclean spirits. ⁸He instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a walking stick—no bread, no bags, and no money in their belts. ⁹He told them to wear sandals but not to put on two shirts. ¹⁰He said, “Whatever house you enter, remain there until you leave that place. ¹¹If a place does not welcome you or listen to you, as you leave, shake the dust off your feet as a witness against them.” ¹²So they went out and proclaimed that people should change their hearts and lives. ¹³They cast out many demons, and they anointed many sick people with olive oil and healed them.

May God bless our hearing of his holy word? Amen.

In America, we have the possibilities of upward mobility thanks to our forefathers and their sacrifices. Whatever was our status; we can move up (or move down). With a combination of hard work, education, timing, and perhaps some luck, it can and does happen. There are seemingly unlimited examples of persons who moved up in America’s long history.

However, in Biblical times, that did not happen. A person could only drop to a lower status. Their claim came from their birth. Period.... The people knew Jesus’ family and that helps to identify who Jesus is (in their opinion).

John Pilch wrote: “Honor governs every dimension of life in the Mediterranean world. This is particularly evident in today’s reading, where Jesus is “in his own country” that is, Nazareth or the vicinity.”

Of particular interest is the statement that Jesus is “the son of Mary.” In the Middle East, a son is always identified by the father (e.g., Simon bar [= son of] Jonah; James and John, the sons of Zebedee). Identifying a son by the mother’s name usually signals some confusion about the father. Luke (4:22) corrects Mark’s report and removes any hint of scandal by identifying Jesus as “Joseph’s son.”

Jesus was an artisan being a carpenter and/or a stone mason as there was more stone than trees. In the Middle East, a son is expected to take up his father’s occupation or profession. There is no expectation of “doing better than one’s parents” or “getting ahead in life.” Honor requires that persons remain in their inherited status and make no effort to improve on it.

How could an artisan, a member of a lower class speak with such authority? The crowd could not understand who really Jesus was, that is the son of God.

Teaching in the synagogue was permissible to qualified males. Jesus' teaching is so impressive that people were amazed by his words. "Many who heard him were astonished" by his teaching and moved by his mighty deeds (Mk 6:2). They seemed ready to grant the honor Jesus was claiming by his striking teaching.

But the crowd, the ultimate judge and bestower of achieved honor, stops short and refuses to concur. To begin with, Jesus is recognized as an artisan, that is, a worker in wood (scarce and precious in ancient Palestine) and stone (more plentiful than wood).

The crowd wondered where could a person born to a manual artisan gain such astounding wisdom. Even more, how could an artisan presumably busy at his craft ever obtain such wisdom? "And they took offense at him."

The second story is about sending out the twelve disciples to proclaim that the kingdom of God is at hand, and their successes. It is one of the few times in the gospels that the disciples are portrayed in a positive light until after the resurrection.

How do we feel about Jesus? Is he an artisan who was charismatic and able to do miracles, or is he divine, the Son of God who died on the cross for the sins of all of us? Does faith in Him help to bring us wisdom by the assistance of the Holy Spirit? Jesus still astounds us with his presence in our lives.

Thank be to God. Amen.