

**Altavista Presbyterian Church
Rev. Eduardo Soto, Jr.**

**“An Unseen Encounter”
Ephesians 4:1-6
I Samuel 24:1-15**

**Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 19, 2018**

Ephesians 4:1-6

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Introduction

A lot has happened in the life of young David since we last saw him in the Valley of Elah. Immediately following the battle with Goliath, David became BFF (best friend forever) with Saul's eldest son, Jonathan. Jonathan's devotion to David is legendary and will have a major impact on both their lives and in the life of King Saul. Saul's son was not the only person moved by David's victory. When Saul triumphantly entered the cities of Israel, many of the wives and daughters of the soldiers sang "Saul has struck down his thousands, but David his ten thousands." In the course of a few days, Saul changed from wanting to deck out David in his own armor to despising and being jealous of David's popularity with the people. Not only was David popular, he was also very successful. Saul attempted to brush David under the rug by appointing him commander of some small force on the edges of the country. But even there, David made a name for himself through his military tactics and victories. All of this, Samuel tells us, was done because God was with David.

There comes a time in every jealous leader's life when he allows the devil to plant within his mind the bright idea of killing the competition. And that's exactly what happened to Saul. He ordered David be killed. Thankfully, Jonathan, who is still BFF with David, warns his friend of his dad's violent compulsion. For years, David lives his life fleeing Saul's catspaws, and all the while he is still making a name for himself. He makes a successful escape from the dungeons of the king of Gath—which, you remember, is where Goliath was from. He made allies with the king of Moab. He saved the city of Keilah from being razed by the Philistines. While, on the other end, King Saul orders the death of 85 persons in Nob, the city of priests. Men, women, children, ox, donkey, and sheep were put to the sword by the order of Israel's king. Saul's jealousy, his anger, and his fear of David lead him to pursue God's chosen one, and that's where we find him in chapter twenty-four.

I Samuel 24:1-15

When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats' Rocks. And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. And the men of David said to him, "Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, 'Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.'" Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe. And immediately David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed,

to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord's anointed." So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way.

Immediately, David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm'? Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed.' See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. May the Lord judge between me and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes wickedness.' But my hand shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! May the Lord therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand."

"An Unseen Encounter"

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

I don't know who "they" are, but they say hindsight is twenty-twenty. This wise, yet elusive "they" are right, however. I know all of us have had one of those hindsight moments. Perhaps it was a moment full of deep regret like some people have when they fail to say a final word of comfort or kindness to a family member who has died. Or perhaps it is not as deeply emotional, like the time I thought of the perfect comeback to someone's comment, but the conversation ended hours before. That one happens to me all the time. Now, there are moments when hindsight is not necessary, and something alien to us seems to direct our path toward the right decision. And after the dust settles or the heart quiets down, do we reflect back and say, "That was the right choice." It's when this happens that I think we open ourselves to being used by God. I believe a moment like this is exactly what happened to David in the cave at Wildgoats' Rocks.

Here we have the young, talented, well-loved David hiding from his king and former confidant. Saul has allowed his jealousy and rage to overtake him and he's in one of those moods where he wants David dead. Now, you know Saul is paranoid and realizes that David is indeed quite powerful. We know this because Samuel tells us that Saul took three thousand *chosen* men to seek after David. It's not just that he took an army to go after one man, he took an army of the best of the best. He's got the best of the SEALs, the best of the Rangers, and the best of the

Marines searching for *one* man. Madness! Here's Saul with all this power, he's the mightiest man in all of Israel and yet he needs three thousand elite soldiers to find a single person. That's what happens when you aren't with God. Remember, God's presence has left Saul, and Saul is aware that God is not with him. But he remains in power. We have in Saul a very powerful ship without a captain.

We are, however, reminded by Samuel over and over again that God is with David. David's success and power come from God and David is fully aware of that too. Just as Saul was aware of God's absence, David was aware of God's presence. He knew that time after time God provided his successes. God delivered him safely out of the land of the Philistines. God delivered into his hands the enemies of Israel. God protected and guided him from the murderous madness of King Saul. And now God has delivered Saul right into David's hands. David's men are quick to see this fact. Saul has wandered away from his host of three thousand men to use the bathroom in a cave. And of all the caves in the wilderness of Engedi he happens upon the one cave in which David is hiding. This could very well turn into bad moment for Saul. Whispering in the back of the cave, David's men tell him, "The day the Lord promised has arrived, and your enemy is delivered into your hands. Deal with him as you see fit" These men were thinking about David sneaking behind Saul and taking his life. And truth be told, David would've been well within his rights to do so. Saul is wrongfully pursuing him. David has been nothing but dutiful and loyal. He's not a traitor or usurper. He's faithful and true. And that's what makes him so popular with the people and so highly favored by God.

So he stealthily makes his way to Saul, who is oblivious to his presence. He draws his knife and takes a slice from Saul's robes. In verse five, some translations say, "*afterward* David's heart struck him." The word "afterward" has a connotation today that suggests delay. As if he waited a good while. I don't think that is what the Hebrew means. I think David's heart *immediately* struck him. Almost as soon as he took that slice he regretted his actions. "I shouldn't be doing this. While Saul is a terrible person and a horrible king, he is still God's anointed. Who am I to decide whether or not a person deserves God's anointing?" If only we all had David's wisdom! If only I had taken the time to consider the implications of judging God's blessings! Hindsight is twenty-twenty.

Thankfully for David he did not need hindsight. He was quick enough to not fully act on his intention. Rather, he convinced his men to retreat and that he would confront Saul directly. David's faith in God meant that he needed to trust in his Lord. For some reason God saw it fit for his royal anointing to be on him while Saul remained alive. He realized that only God can take away what God gives. The powerful, successful, talented, and well-loved David was still nothing before our Awesome and Unknowable God. And so he put his trust in this God who did anoint Saul, whose presence was at one time with Saul, and whose image is still present in Saul.

The difference between Saul and David boils down to orientation. Saul was oriented internally. He was selfish. He was prideful. He was focused on how others would perceive him that he turned his back on God's commands. David was oriented upwardly. His faith kept God in the

forefront. His hope was always in God's providence. His life was always directed to bring glory to God alone. And he recognized that God, and God alone, acts as Judge. Saul believed the words of other men, the lies that David sought him harm. Instead of finding out the truth or turning to God for guidance, he turned to hunt David down. "I'm the king, justice and vengeance are mine!" His foolhardy quest nearly cost him his life. But David knew where judgment truly lies. "May the *Lord* judge between me and you, may the *Lord* avenge me against you, but *my* hand shall *not* be against you."

David had the physical and legal ability to end Saul's life. But he didn't. Instead he placed his trust and reliance on God. Just because God gives you the ability and power to do something doesn't necessarily mean you should. I have the ability and opportunity to take out my frustrations on other people. You have the ability and opportunity to spread idle gossip. We all have the ability and opportunities to cause things to happen **or** to prevent things from happening. Going against God's will is not limited to *doing* bad things, but also includes *not doing* good things. Not rendering someone aid. Not stopping a bully. Not giving of your time or treasures because it's an inconvenience. These are moments equally regretted in hindsight.

You know, Jesus had the power to kill and create, same as God. But he chose to bring life to the dead, healing to the sick, and hope to the hopeless. Jesus had the power to do anything he wanted, but rather he chose to reveal God's grace and glory. The first question of the Westminster Catechism asks *what is the chief end of man?* And the answer: *to glorify God and enjoy him forever.* Do we have the power to give life to the dead? Sadly, no. Do we have the power to heal the sick? Well, we can surely pray and try. Do we have the power to bring hope to the hopeless? Absolutely. Everything that we say and do and don't say and leave undone ought to reflect God's glory and reveal his hope to someone in need. He is our creator, sustainer, and redeemer. We owe everything we have to God. He should be in the forefront of our minds. Back in the 90's there was the WWJD movement. Everyone had those little wristbands that were supposed to provoke the mind to ask, *what would Jesus do?* Today, I ask you church *how do you bring glory to God?* Christ reveals to us God's name and God's love; how do we reflect that same precious name and wondrous love to a world like ours?

Let us pray. Awesome God, you give to us our talents, our treasures, and time itself. Far too often we use our gifts in selfish ways, in vengeful ways, in idolatrous ways. Forgive us, O Lord, for the things we do and the things we leave undone. Give to us your wisdom, your discernment, and your conscience that we may bring glory to your name. Orient us in the right direction through the Double Love Rule: we are to love you, O God, with our whole selves and love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Help us in this endeavor, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.