

The Covenant Sealed©

Matthew 28:1-10; 1 Samuel 18:1-4; 2 Samuel 9:1-10 Galatians 4:4-7; John 1:12-13

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Easter Sunday

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When you were a child, did you ever become “blood brothers” with a close friend? Do you know what I’m referring to? You would each prick your finger enough to make it bleed and then rub your fingers with the other so that your blood would mingle together. So that, supposedly each of you had the other person’s blood running in your veins, along with your own.

I did it with a friend. Maybe you did too. Today, as we are so careful about not spreading disease, not touching another’s blood, that kind of thing would be discouraged.

I thought that ritual came from Native Americans and maybe it did, but it actually goes way back further than that. You heard me read a little portion from 1st and 2nd Samuel and about covenant and commitment.

It is a story of David – God’s beloved, anointed David – who was an unknown shepherd boy, the youngest of the sons of Jesse of Bethlehem. Saul had been made king but he did something displeasing to the Lord and so God had the priest, Samuel, searches for the next king until he found David. David who killed the giant, Goliath. Which made Saul jealous and angry. Saul who tried to kill David.

And there was Jonathan, Saul’s son who became David’s best friend. They made a covenant together that they would always have each other’s back – protecting each other, honoring their friendship.

In these covenants of old, there were several rituals done. We talked about one of them a couple of weeks ago – the one where animals were cut in half and lined up opposite each other. The persons making the covenant would walk through in a figure eight – symbolizing infinity. The word covenant, in Hebrew, actually means cut.

They would also exchange garments – their robes and also their swords, indicating that everything they had belonged to each other and that they would defend the other.

But then, they would cut their wrists and put them together with the other, as in a handshake and their blood would mingle and they would become “blood brothers.”

The term “blood is thicker than water” comes from this ritual. It isn’t that blood relatives are closer than those who are not born into the same family. It is that a covenant made together, adopting one another – is a stronger tie than any other. And that relationship would extend throughout the family. So that, any family member of Jonathans would be a family member of David, and vice versa.

So, Jonathon protected David from his father, Saul, who tried to kill David. Eventually, Saul and his sons, including Jonathan were killed. And all the rest of Saul and Jonathans family ran for fear that they would all be killed next – perhaps by David because of Saul’s treatment of David.

But also, when a new king came onto the scene, usually all of the family remaining from the former king was done away with just to be sure there would be no other powers trying to creep in. Unfortunately for Saul's family, they were deceived in believing that's what David wanted to do.

Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, who was only five at the time, was being carried by a nursemaid who was running to get away and hide. She fell and both of the legs of the boy were broken and he was a cripple for the rest of his life.

He lived as a pauper – afraid, and in bad physical shape. He lived in Lo Debar – the name of the town meaning a place of nothing; no pasture; not having anything. It stood for a poor and lonely place.

But David sent a servant to seek Mephibosheth and bring him back. The son was grown now and afraid when he was brought to David. He fell before David asking why he was seeking him – “for I am like a dead dog,” he said.

But for David, it wasn't really about Mephibosheth. It was about honoring his covenant commitment with his beloved friend, Jonathan. It was because of Jonathan and for Jonathan's sake that David showed Mephibosheth this great *hesed* (kindness).

David restored to him his rightful inheritance that was from his grandfather and fathers, but he also gave him his own inheritance. He came to live at the palace with king David and to eat at his table as royalty. He was given the robe and treated as a prince. All because of the covenant made between two men who cared deeply for one another and who made an everlasting covenant.

So why would I share this Old Testament story with you on Easter Sunday? Does it seem out of place?

Well, think about this. We've been talking about covenant throughout this Lenten Season. We've been considering how God made covenant promises from the very beginning of time – because of what? Love! God's amazing love for his people.

Let's go back to the Garden of Eden – the beginning of creation, and God's relationship with humans. Adam and Eve were blessed with an everlasting inheritance. Everything God created, he gave to them to enjoy. But what happened? They were deceived.

And because of the deception, they disobeyed God and they were crippled by a fall – the fall of humans into sin. And that fall led to generations of people being crippled. Do you understand that fall? Because of sin – because of disobedience to God – humanity could never get back to the perfect state of being in complete unity with God, the Creator. Humans lost the perfect life of living in Paradise and that is how they were crippled. And that continued throughout time. Humans needed to be restored to our inheritance that we had in the beginning, before the deception; before the fall.

But, nothing seemed to work. No matter how God called and promised to be our God if we would simply obey and come back to him, we could not seem to do it. We remained living in Lo Debar – that lonely place of nothingness.

And years later, because God – the God who made covenant with Abraham, with Noah, with Moses and the Israelites – the God who called and anointed David – that same Covenant God cut a covenant with his Son, Jesus. A covenant that would be upheld into eternity.

Jesus would die for the forgiveness of sins. God would remember the covenant and therefore remember the sins of the people no longer. Because of Jesus, the people were sought out, wooed back to the heart of God, and given an inheritance that would mean we are his children. People would be God's children and God would be our God.

And Jesus kept the covenant by shedding his own blood and dying for all. The covenant was fulfilled. The people did not have to do a thing. We could not do a thing to save ourselves, we could not earn that forgiveness, or salvation. It was by Jesus' fulfilling his promise; it was by God honoring his covenant with his precious son, Jesus – it is by that covenant that we are saved.

And in that faithful fulfillment God's power accomplished even more. He raised Jesus from death to life and brought him home to his right royal place.

What does it mean for us that Jesus died a cruel death on a cross? It means we are forgiven of our sins. It means God loved us so much that he could not let us go. So much that he sent his only Son to die in our place.

What does it mean for us that Jesus was resurrected? It means that we too shall be raised from death to life and that we too will be in that heavenly home with our loving heavenly Father into eternity. It means we have new life even here and now.

Just as Jonathans son was sought out and brought home to David; was adopted into the royal family and loved as David's own son, we too have been sought and brought out of that lonely land and we too are loved.

We are included in the covenant. And we have such a great reminder of it. Each time we break bread and drink from the cup we remember that Christ Jesus sealed the covenant in his blood so that we too can be a part of the family of God. We have a place at the table. We are forgiven and freed and loved beyond measure.

The apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians:
 "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God." (Galatians 4:4-7, NRSV)

Jesus Christ is the new covenant, a covenant that is sealed by his very blood. We didn't have to do anything. We could not do anything to heal or save ourselves.

The one thing we are asked to do is to believe. John writes in chapter 1 of his gospel: "But to all who received him, (Jesus) who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12-13, NRSV)

Christ is risen and that means we too shall rise up and have new life. Just as David sought out Mephibosheth because of his covenant with Jonathan – God seeks us out because of his covenant with Jesus.

And we, who are like Mephibosheth – who were as good as a dead dog, living in the land of nothing – have our inheritance, that was lost in the crippling fall, fully restored to us. We are adopted into the family of God and given a place at that table.

The covenant is complete. Christ has died. Christ is risen! Christ will come again. Alleluia!

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