

DAVID AND PETER
Sunday, August 2, 2020
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As most of you know, before the pandemic, part of my job was to visit if any of my 400 residents happen to be in the hospital or rehab. One day I visited a gentleman who greeted me with “Hey, what are you doing here? I thought you only visited the saints!” I hesitated a minute. While this guy was usually a jokester, I was not sure if he was joking this time. I could say something smart like, “Yeah, if I only visited the saints, I would stay home all day long and collect my paycheck.” Or I could try to be more serious and say, “I visit everyone so I can turn the sinners into saints.” But maybe, just maybe, this time the guy was being serious. Racing through my mind were the stories of two great men of faith, strong and true, yet saints as well as sinners.

I want to talk first about David. Now I know far more about David than I ever thought I would because two of my Old Testament professors had focused on David as their major theological works. Now that sounds great until I tell you that they didn’t exactly agree which made it politically interesting when you were writing papers that both would be reading and grading. But I came to appreciate David’s complexities because of those two men. David is only written about in the Books of Samuel, I King and I Chronicles. In both the Old Testament and New, David is called, “a man after God’s own heart.” He is important to three faiths because he is called a prophet in Islam. First let’s look at the triumphs of David.

At first Israel does not have kings but finally Saul is anointed but quickly annoys God so Samuel is sent to anoint David, the youngest of Jesse’s eight sons the great-grandson of Ruth and a shepherd in the field. He plays music for King Saul to calm the king’s nerves and was kept in Saul’s service. David displays his courage when as a youngster who is willing to face a giant Philistine with only a sling and five stones. David becomes a commander and a dear friend of Jonathan, Saul’s son. Saul is jealous of David and tricks him into believing David can marry his oldest daughter but finally allows David to marry his second daughter.

Saul wants Jonathan to kill David but instead he hides David. Saul relents and says he will not kill David but soon tries to kill him again. David’s wife helps him escape but he does return briefly to make peace with Jonathan. Good fortune flows from the hand of God for David and 600 men join him. David traps Saul in a cave but lets him live. Saul asked David to promise

not to wipe out his descendants but continues to try and kill David, God's clear favorite.

When Saul and Jonathan are killed by the Philistines, the southern Jews of Judah crown David king while the northern tribes, Israel, anoint a son of Saul. David grows stronger and stronger and soon he takes over the northern tribes. David is 30 years old at this time. Everyone could clearly see that it was God's will that David should shepherd the newly united nation.

After capturing the city of Jebus, David brings the Ark of the Covenant there and renames it Jerusalem. God establishes a Davidic Covenant, a promise that David's throne was eternal. David's successes continue as he conquers more and more neighbors.

But apparently, even a man after God's own heart can slip up. David, who has endless numbers of wives and concubines, spies Bathsheba, the only wife of a soldier named Uriah. David demands that she come to him. Clearly, this is David's sin though many have blamed Bathsheba through the years. She becomes pregnant and David has her husband killed. The prophet, Nathan, confronts David with "You are the man!" and David admits his sin. Even though David marries Bathsheba the baby is struck with illness and dies. Continual triumphs suddenly turn to Troubles and Tragedies. Even though David falls on his knees, confessing, even writing Psalm 51 that we read in the beginning, praying to God and worshipping God does not save David from the consequences. God promises David that a rebellion would come from inside his own house. One son rapes a daughter and is slain by another son. That son rebels and David is forced to flee his capital until finally the son dies but not before many deaths of many soldiers. David returns home to eventually die at Jerusalem. From such lofty heights King David has slumped. His reign is secure but at what cost? Yet his heir is the one the Jews await. The one we await to return. This courageous sinner, killing king, adulterous father is a mighty man of God in our eyes. Great national leader but within his family and personal life.... HMMMMMMMM..... What do you say, Saint or Sinner?????

The other man I thought of was Simon Peter. Born near the Sea of Galilee Peter is a fisherman like his family. Jesus calls him to leave all that to fish for people. I wonder what his wife had to say about that. Bet she didn't say he was a saint. Galileans were known for their tempers and passion and Peter had both. But maybe just maybe she changed her mind when Jesus heals her mother at their home. Peter follows Jesus and deals with the crowds that follow. The night that Jesus walks on water on the Sea of Galilee the disciples are afraid and only Peter, only Peter, has enough faith to ask Jesus to help him get out of the boat. Now we know that Peter falters

when he suddenly notices the wind and has to be saved by Jesus but seriously the other eleven were still hovering in the boat.

A truly great moment comes for Peter at Caesarea Philippi which is 25 miles north-east of Galilee. This was a non-Jewish area where Jesus took his disciples to try and prepare them for the work they must carry on after he was gone. At Caesarea, Jesus would not be bothered by Pharisees and Jewish followers. After this preparation Jesus would turn toward Jerusalem and what awaited there. He asked the disciples who people thought he was. Various answers included John the Baptist, Elijah or even Jeremiah. When Jesus ask the disciples who they thought he was it is Peter who confidently declares, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!" and is assured that he is blessed. Jesus says, "You are Petro(rock), and on this Petra(rock) I will build my Church." All Jews knew that rabbis called Abraham the rock upon which God found the world. God, as well, is referred to as a Rock in Deuteronomy and the Psalms. No greater compliment could have been paid to Peter than this statement by Jesus. God may be the Rock of faith but Peter will be the first stone of the Church that is to come. Peter is told he will have the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, the steward of the household of God. Peter has made a great discovery and now great privilege has been bestowed as well as great responsibility.

So things are going well for Peter it would seem. He begs Jesus to wash all of him at the Last Supper and stands to defend Christ against the High Priest and his solders, cutting off one person's ear but like David, Peter's downfall awaits. First, Peter falls asleep as Jesus prays in Gethsemane. Then Jesus is questioned by the High Priest. Peter denies knowing him not once but three times before the cock crows as Jesus had foretold and Peter vehemently denied. How does someone like Peter go from such triumph to such trouble? He doesn't appear to be at the cross and only shows up at the tomb when he is called by Mary. Yet this sinking denier is the one who must lead the disciples forward without Jesus. I stood in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican and touched the foot of the statue of Peter there like so many millions before me and I wondered, "Sinner or Saint????"

What did I tell that resident giving me a hard time? "Everyone I visit is a saint and a sinner!" He said, "Huh?" Well, of course, we are all sinners, no denying that. Our sins are just as bad as David's or Peter's. We violate God's commandments and deny Christ in the way we live. But being a saint doesn't mean living a perfect life or even a good life. It doesn't even mean being dead. Saints are people who live their faith even though they often have doubts. Saints in the Old Testament went to places they never dreamed of and accomplished feats that seemed impossible because they

listened to God. Saints from the New Testament and early church believed that Christ died on the cross for them, even the man on the cross beside Jesus. Saints through the years and those who sat in the pews of so many churches were saintly because of their faith in Christ not their deeds. The song says “Nothing can for sin atone, Not the good that I have done. By Christ’s grace the war is won, nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

David and Peter were great men of faith and real screw-ups. They believed strongly and failed badly. They were sinners and saints all together. Just like the man I visited that day, just like you and just like me. You are a saint no matter how down you are, how horrible you have been, how much you’ve hurt someone when you put your faith in the fact that Christ died for you.

Gracious Lord, we admit we often fail even as we put our faith in your Son, Jesus. Help us in the tough moments to live as you intended. We thank you for your Son and for the saints who have gone before us. Be with us in this uncertain time and help us be lights in a dark world. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.