

## *In Nomine Jesu*

**Prayer Upon Entering Church:** Almighty and everlasting God, always more ready to hear than we to pray and always ready to give more than we either desire or deserve, pour down on us the abundance of Your mercy, forgiving us the things of which our conscience is afraid and giving us the good things we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### **The Text**

#### **2 Samuel 13:32-33**

But Jonadab the son of Shimeah, David's brother, said, "Let not my lord suppose that they have killed all the young men the king's sons, for Amnon alone is dead. For by the command of Absalom this has been determined from the day he violated his sister Tamar. <sup>33</sup>Now therefore let not my lord the king so take it to heart as to suppose that all the king's sons are dead, for Amnon alone is dead."

#### **2 Samuel 13:39**

And the spirit of the king longed to go out to Absalom, because he was comforted about Amnon, since he was dead.

#### **2 Samuel 14:25-27**

Now in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. <sup>26</sup>And when he cut the hair of his head (for at the end of every year he used to cut it; when it was heavy on him, he cut it), he weighed the hair of his head, two hundred shekels by the king's weight. <sup>27</sup>There were born to Absalom three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar. She was a beautiful woman.

#### **2 Samuel 15:1-6**

After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him. <sup>2</sup>And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate. And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, "From what city are you?"

And when he said, "Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel,"  
<sup>3</sup>Absalom would say to him, "See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you." <sup>4</sup>Then Absalom would say, "Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice." <sup>5</sup>And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. <sup>6</sup>Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

### **2 Samuel 15:13**

And a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom."

### **2 Samuel 16:21-22**

Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house, and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened." <sup>22</sup>So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof. And Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

### **2 Samuel 18:1-2**

Then David mustered the men who were with him and set over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. <sup>2</sup>And David sent out the army, one third under the command of Joab, one third under the command of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and one third under the command of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said to the men, "I myself will also go out with you."

### **2 Samuel 18:5-9**

And the king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders about Absalom.

<sup>6</sup>So the army went out into the field against Israel, and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. <sup>7</sup>And the men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the loss there was great on that day, twenty thousand men. <sup>8</sup>The battle spread over the face of all the country, and the forest devoured more people that day than the sword.

<sup>9</sup>And Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great terebinth, and his head caught fast in the oak, and he was suspended between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on.

## 2 Samuel 18:15

And ten young men, Joab's armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him and killed him.

## 2 Samuel 18:31-33

And behold, the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, "Good news for my lord the king! For the LORD has delivered you this day from the hand of all who rose up against you." <sup>32</sup>The king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" And the Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up against you for evil be like that young man." <sup>33</sup> And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

## The Sermon

If a belief in a good God – who wants goodness in His Children – must lie at the heart of moral living – if – in other words – God comes **first** – then it is equally certain that the family comes **second**. Since morals have to do with the way in which we live together with others – and the estimate we have of ourselves – the place where we first begin to learn and practice the good life in Christ – is in the home.

For the Christian – this ancient conviction of the importance of the home – is equally basic. It is basic theologically – as well as morally. It was in the family life of His race – and out of His experience in the carpenter's home at Nazareth that Jesus gained His great insights into the nature of God – God's relationship to mankind – and man's relationship with his fellows.

So the great concepts of the Fatherhood of God – and the brotherhood of man – are concepts drawn from Jewish family life. King David learned them in **his** home from **his** father Jesse. Intensely personal terms these are – which lie at the heart of our Faith – as Jesus gives it to us. Therefore we

can't even know what God is like – or what constitutes our true relationships with others – apart from the experience which a good home alone can give.

This is what fell apart in David's palace home after his adulterous affair with Bathsheba. And this is precisely what Nathan prophesied would happen as a consequence. It isn't surprising – that the ebb and flow of real religion – the moral tone which it produces – is vitally and intimately connected with the quality of family life. So if there is breakdown of morality in the vital religion essential to living the good life – then we must look for one of the basic causes of this unhappy fact - in the breakdown of the home.

So it is in our republic today. And so it was in the home of King David 3000 years ago. The integrity of the home depends upon the relationship between the husband and wife. Before ever God gives them the privilege and responsibility of parenthood – there must exist the prior privilege and responsibility of the love shared by man and wife.

To be husband and wife requires infinitely more than pleasure in bed. Marriage requires the ability to communicate with each other. It requires the joy of shared experiences of mind and spirit. Marriage requires the serious attempt to understand another human soul. It requires the capacity to give and take. Marriage requires the resolution of differences without rancor or resentment. And marriage requires the respect for another's personality which resists the temptation to make it over and micro-manage it.

In the home of King David – Absalom feels unloved because he doesn't know what real love is. He doesn't know it – because he has never seen it exemplified in his parents' attitudes toward each other. **He has not seen faithfulness.** This is a devastating truth. Parents too often find a substitute for the love for each other in their love for their children. So it was with David and Absalom. And, for that matter, so it was with Bathsheba and Solomon.

So wives become maternal slaves – and husbands work themselves to death – to provide material advantages for their children. But the child – the child instinctively sees through this – and failing to see the love relationship working between his father and mother – he becomes rebellious and a problem child. This is was with Absalom.

Frankly, I suspect that this weakness of the heart in modern family life is as responsible as anything else for the modern cult of child-centeredness which – beginning in the home – has now pretty well taken over in education in public schools. The home tends to revolve around the child.

So togetherness and palmsmanship take over – and the child soon gets the impression that the family exists primarily for **him**. Absalom was raised that way in the aftermath of David's adultery. And the trouble is that even marriages which are soundly based to begin with – can be harmed – sometimes irrevocably – when the child takes over – as Absalom did – in the years leading up to his rebellion – revolution – and the civil war that ensued.

And even more important in the long run – the child misses the most important fundamental of moral living – which is learning that in the world – his own ego and his own desires must be seen in reference to those of other people. If he does not learn this – as Absalom did not – how can we expect him to be a good citizen – and a good Christian – later on?

I would like to put in a plea for the importance of parents. Parents have rights too. They are entitled to some privacy. They are entitled – by virtue of years and experience - to have opinions – and to set standards – and to expect the child to abide by them. Disappointments - and the inability to have one's own way – are important factors in moral living. What is so wrong about a child learning how to meet these things in the home?

The fact is that law is essential to our ordered society. And where else can a child learn the importance of rules and the results of disobedience than in the home? You know that self-discipline is an acquired art – born out of discipline imposed by some external authority.

And when that authority is based upon parental love – it has a much better chance to result in true self-discipline – than the loveless disciplines society will impose later on. Now, no generation of parents in history has been more self-conscious – more susceptible – to expert opinion. Why is it then – that in spite of this – so many of us fail to do as good a job as our grandparents – who never had Dr. Spock's baby book – never had all these child psychologists running around – and never had all these extra-curricular activities we demand of our public schools?

I'll tell you why: it is because we are making the same mistake King David made! We are taking ourselves and our parental responsibilities too seriously – **and not taking our marriages seriously enough**. Certainly, there are too few of us even among Christians who remember and practice our religion in our homes.

And if the home is messed up – if it is parent-centered or child-centered – and not God-centered and Christ-centered – it cannot perform the divine function – which the home of a simple carpenter in Nazareth performed long ago when Jesus and His brothers were small children. That is why God sets us in families: that in the tiny microcosm of the home – men and women may learn to live as morally responsible people – people who are redeemer – people who are restored – people who are forgiven – by the precious Blood of Christ – to live out there in that great big world on planet earth – that we call home. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

***SOLI DEO GLORIA!***