

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10

All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Look, we are your bone and flesh. For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The Lord said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel." So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel.

David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.

David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inward. And David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.*

Is God With Us? - July 4, 2021

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10g

On this July 4th Sunday it seems especially appropriate to look to God to help us answer questions about where our nation and our world is going. You don't need me to tell you that not just this past year, but the past few years have been quite different from what many of us have been used to. In so many aspects of life and living, it is quite correct to say we are in the midst of many changes. So much is happening that is disrupting what we have grown up with. Some of these disruptions have been for the better. Others for the worse. Most of what is changing is so uncertain that we just don't know what is going to happen.

Let's take the gradual ending of the Covid pandemic. A year ago, we were in the middle of one of several spikes in the infection rate. So much of normal life had ground to a halt. We were worshipping exclusively online, wearing masks whenever we went outdoors, working remotely from our homes if possible, and spending much more time with families than we had done in a long time. At this time last year, there were only hints about an effective vaccination being found.

Now for most of us in this region, Covid is almost a thing of the past. Around here, most people followed the CDC guidance and got vaccinated and we've seen clearly that just about the only ones getting sick are those who did not get vaccinated when they could have. Nowadays we can do almost everything we used to do before the pandemic hit and by the time school starts again, Covid, at least around here, should be nothing more than a bad memory.

No question that in certain parts of our country, Covid will still be infecting those who doubt the science or believe in conspiracy theories. At least people in the US have a choice. Billions around the world are still very much caught up in the spread of Covid and it may be years before some are vaccinated and their lives go back to where they were.

It is appropriate to ask where God is in the midst of this pandemic. I have no doubt that God is with the families all over the world who have lost loved ones. God is with the frontline workers all over the world trying to prevent Covid from getting worse. God was in the laboratories as the vaccine was being developed and God certainly was with leaders who came up with the plans to distribute the vaccine to millions in an impressively short time.

Yes God is certainly with us as we deal with Covid. Just as time and again God has proven God is with the people in all the good and bad times.

Today's scripture is about the coronation of King David of Israel. David, as we know, is regarded as Israel's most beloved King, held up as a model of what a good leader should be. Not that David was perfect, far from it. David had rivers of blood on his hands, as a warrior and commander of the army of Israel. David raped a woman and sent her husband to the front lines of battle to be killed when she discovered she was pregnant with David's child. David's own sons even plotted against him.

Yet, David is continually mentioned in the New Testament as the ancestor of Jesus. In the Old Testament, Israel waited for the Messiah who would be a descendent of David. God used David, with all his abilities and all his failings to lead Israel just as God can use any of us, with our abilities and our failings.

It is reasonable to question God on how a rapist and murderer could have any place in God's plans. Yet we can look at our own time and quickly recall leaders of all kinds whose lives are hardly models of perfection. When we want to, we human beings are able to overlook a lot of things about certain individuals — when we want to.

But what distinguished David from Saul who went before him and Solomon and all those who came after him was that David, more than any other king before or after was able to recognize his sins, confess, repent, and start over again with his God.

We live in an ocean of hypocrisy, don't we? From our leaders to our neighbors to ourselves, we often find it much easier to criticize those around us for their failings rather than take the sometimes painful steps to look at our own failings and try to change ourselves for the better. David was never perfect and he kept making mistakes all through his life, but one thing he never stopped doing was to remember that God was always with him and only wanted the best for David and for Israel.

So the real question of the day should not be whether God is with us or not. Rather we should be asking ourselves whether we are with God or not.

Yes, are we with God? Because I fear that the answer is increasingly no. I can't help but wonder if God really has a place in the lives of most people? Does God, faith, the Bible, Jesus, really influence our daily lives as we make our way through life?

It would be the height of arrogance for me to say that coming to church and worshipping God here or online is the only pathway to God — or even the best. God knows how imperfect organized

religion is of every variety. God knows that we Christians often talk and act like we have never heard of Jesus Christ, let alone try to follow his teachings.

Yet, if we think that God being in our lives is important to us, how can we know who God is or what God wants for us if we can't be bothered with worship, prayer, study, mission, and fellowship? I mean without regular contact with God in a community such as this, how can we possibly recognize our faults and failings and strive to become better people?

David, for all that he did wrong, nevertheless made sure that prayer and worship were indispensable parts of his life. He encouraged the priests and prophets to talk to him and challenge him. As King, he knew that he could not command the army alone. He needed God's help. Israel was a little country surrounded by huge empires. Survival for Israel and for David meant following God as closely as possible and by doing so, David succeeded. Today's passage concludes, "And David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him."

Nowadays, friends, I keep wondering what is the compass that is guiding people's lives? Can we really expect to have a future as individuals, as a nation, as a world if our guiding principles are, "Be Nice", or "Be Good." I mean really, what do those empty phrases really mean, anyway?

Being nice is far more than saying "hello" or holding the door open at Wawa. Being nice can be really difficult when you find yourself doing things to help others at your own expense. It is a very nice thing to take care of your relatives, but it is a very hard thing to help them over and over again when you are giving up job opportunities, or relationships, or income, or much-needed rest. There are people who do their best to care for relatives — and many others who avoid it entirely.

Being good often means doing the right thing without counting the cost. Goodness, genuine goodness entails taking significant risks to make life better for others, even if we suffer in the process. The really good people of this world speak truth, when it is not popular. Good people fight for justice and speak out for those who have no voice — again at risk to their livelihoods or even lives.

Being nice and being good, from a Christian perspective, are not easy things to do. Yet I fear that without the help and guidance a relationship with God provides, there is much less niceness and goodness in the world. Is it a coincidence that hatred, fear, mistrust, and injustice are on the rise?

On this 4th of July Sunday, it is more than appropriate to ask what values drive our nation today? After the sermon, we're going to sing "America the Beautiful." It is a patriotic song, but when you listen to the words, you find that it is a very different kind of patriotic song. Unlike the Star-Spangled

Banner, which tells the story of an American victory in the War of 1812, “America the Beautiful” offers a vision of what America is supposed to be about.

Listen to the end of the second stanza: America! America! / God mend thine every flaw, / Confirm thy soul in self-control, / Thy liberty in law! What kind of patriotic song admits that we are flawed? What song seeks God’s help to mend us? What song seeks a justice system whose laws proclaim liberty?

The third stanza goes even further: America! America! / May God thy gold refine, / Till all success be nobleness, / And every gain divine! Wow. This verse actively seeks God’s help in moving our nation away from selfish and narrow values and instead shifting our purpose and our gains to be in line with God’s purposes, not ours!

And finally, the fourth stanza repeats the words we all know: America! America! / God shed His grace on thee / And crown thy good with brotherhood / From sea to shining sea! I have to ask the question, friends, are we moving in the direction of greater brotherhood and sisterhood or are we working to tear it all apart?

On this Fourth of July, I truly wonder how America can possibly hope to attain the ideals and ideas contained in this song if we choose to exclude God from our lives? Without God and people recognizing our need to live according to God’s plan and not our own, what hope do we have?

Who are we going to be as a nation? Who are we going to be as individuals? Are we going to be nice and good — two utterly worthless words? Or are we going to allow God into our lives once again so God can mend our every flaw, God can take our gold and refine it to God’s shining purposes, and this nation will finally become a place of full brotherhood and sisterhood, embracing, welcoming, and lifting up every single one of us?

King David trusted his God. Will we trust King David’s God?

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.