

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash,
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1 Samuel 20

True Christian Friendship

- 1. Present in the hour of trial*
- 2. Assisting with another's needs*
- 3. Sacrificing for another's benefit*

Hymns: 'Tis Time Now to Awake – 154 –
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All Scripture quotations from the NIV

1 Samuel 20:1-42 –

David fled from Naioth at Ramah and went to Jonathan and asked, "What have I done? What is my crime? How have I wronged your father, that he is trying to take my life?" "Never!" Jonathan replied. "You are not going to die! Look, my father doesn't do anything, great or small, without confiding in me. Why would he hide this from me? It's not so!"

But David took an oath and said, "Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said to himself, 'Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved.' Yet as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death."

Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you." So David said, "Look, tomorrow is the New Moon festival, and I am supposed to dine with the king; but let me go and hide in the field until the evening of the day after tomorrow. If your father misses me at all, tell him, 'David earnestly asked my permission to hurry to Bethlehem, his hometown, because an annual sacrifice is being made there for his whole clan.' If he says, 'Very well,' then your servant is safe. But if he loses his temper, you can be sure that he is determined to harm me. As for you, show kindness to your servant, for you have brought

him into a covenant with you before the LORD. If I am guilty, then kill me yourself! Why hand me over to your father?" "Never!" Jonathan said. "If I had the least inkling that my father was determined to harm you, wouldn't I tell you?"

David asked, "Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?" "Come," Jonathan said, "let's go out into the field." So they went there together.

Then Jonathan said to David: "By the LORD, the God of Israel, I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know? But if my father is inclined to harm you, may the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away safely. May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father. But show me unfailing kindness like that of the LORD as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family-- not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth."

So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD call David's enemies to account." And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself. Then Jonathan said to David: "Tomorrow is the New Moon festival. You will be missed, because your seat will be empty. The day after tomorrow, toward evening, go to the place where you hid when this trouble began, and wait by the stone Ezel. I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I were shooting at a target. Then I will send a boy and say, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I say to him, 'Look, the arrows are on this side of you; bring them here,' then come, because, as surely as the LORD lives, you are safe; there is no danger. But if I say to the boy, 'Look, the arrows are beyond you,' then you must go, because the LORD has sent you away. And about the matter you and I discussed-- remember, the LORD is witness between you and me forever."

So David hid in the field, and when the New Moon festival came, the king sat down to eat. He sat in his customary place by the wall,

opposite Jonathan, and Abner sat next to Saul, but David's place was empty. Saul said nothing that day, for he thought, "Something must have happened to David to make him ceremonially unclean-- surely he is unclean."

But the next day, the second day of the month, David's place was empty again. Then Saul said to his son Jonathan, "Why hasn't the son of Jesse come to the meal, either yesterday or today?" Jonathan answered, "David earnestly asked me for permission to go to Bethlehem. He said, 'Let me go, because our family is observing a sacrifice in the town and my brother has ordered me to be there. If I have found favor in your eyes, let me get away to see my brothers.' That is why he has not come to the king's table."

Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!"

"Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asked his father. But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David. Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the month he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David.

In the morning Jonathan went out to the field for his meeting with David. He had a small boy with him, and he said to the boy, "Run and find the arrows I shoot." As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. When the boy came to the place where Jonathan's arrow had fallen, Jonathan called out after him, "Isn't the arrow beyond you?" Then he shouted, "Hurry! Go quickly! Don't stop!" The boy picked up the arrow and returned to his master. (The boy knew nothing of all this; only Jonathan and David knew.) Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said, "Go, carry them back to town."

After the boy had gone, David got up from the south side and bowed down before Jonathan three times, with his face to the ground. Then they kissed each other and wept

together - but David wept the most. Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'" Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.

"I thought you were my friend!" How many times have you heard that said bitterly? How many times have you said it?

A boast made by some today is that they have "lots of friends." But if a real test of friendship was made, how many would remain? Some of them might have an interest only because of an advantage they may have in associating with a certain person. Others might be "Judas" friends, bought for a price. Some might be simple hypocrites. What is a true friend? A friend is not an "acquaintance" or a "contact." A friend is much more!

Since many people have a hazy view of what the terms "friend" and "friendship" mean, it is good for us to see an example of this in Scripture today. This morning we read about the example of Jonathan, a true friend to David in the Old Testament. **Jonathan proved to be a true friend to David in three ways. He was:**

- 1. Present in the hour of trial**
- 2. Assisting with another's needs**
- 3. Sacrificing for another's benefit**

1 – What was David's hour of trial?

Some background is needed. In the chapters preceding our text the nation of Israel had ventured into the era of the kings. In the book of Judges they had not had kings, and eventually they cried out to God, "Give us a king!" So the Lord had granted their wish and had the prophet Samuel anoint Saul the first king of Israel. At first Saul was a humble king. God granted him successes in ruling the people and military ventures. But pride soon became his enemy. To make a long story short, Saul disobeyed the Lord and was rejected by God as king, even though his reign continued.

The Lord had Samuel anoint a new king, the young shepherd boy David from Jesse's family. Soon after David was anointed in a

private ceremony at his father's house, we read the story of David and Goliath when David defeated the giant and brought victory over the Philistines. After that time David enjoyed great popularity among the people. Saul became jealous, yet he had David live in his court as an honored guest and play his lyre, which he was quite skilled at. Things deteriorated as Saul's jealousy grew. We hear that an evil spirit came to him and caused him great depression and anger. On more than one occasion, Saul hurled his javelin at David in the palace. At the time immediately before our text David has been forced to run from Saul. Jonathan (Saul's oldest son) is not totally aware of the gravity of the situation; Saul has hidden his thoughts from him.

David's dilemma is that he is the future king of Israel, but he is not in power and his life is in danger from Saul. He is being pursued in his hour of trial!

- Where would he go where Saul would not find him?
- And how would he ever escape?
- Would he become a victim of Saul's rage before his hope to rule over Israel would be realized?

Then our example of true friendship shines forth in Jonathan. Jonathan was Saul's oldest son. As David's star had risen in Israel, he had become David's close friend. As things continue to deteriorate at the time of our reading, Jonathan proves to be a true friend. He is there for David in his hour of trial. When David comes to him privately, he hears David's concerns out. He takes them seriously. As things become clearer to Jonathan concerning his father's wicked plans, Jonathan consoles David. He weeps with him later when he sees his father's true intentions. Also, in Middle Eastern culture the kiss has always been the sign and seal of true friendship, as he showed his friendship and love to David. He offered his prayers to the Lord for David. How comforting it must have been for David to see true friendship in Jonathan!

Are you a true friend? Proverbs 17:17 says, "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." **Our first lesson is that true Christian friendship is present in the hour of trial.** Yet what is our temptation?

- It's so easy to live our life in oblivion to the trials of our acquaintances, and not be a true friend. After all, we're so busy! Many days our own trials are the only thing on our mind.
- Or the temptation exists to avoid people who are hurting. Perhaps we're afraid we'll feel awkward seeing someone who's going through a trial. Maybe we're afraid we won't know what to say. It's certainly easy to hang around with our acquaintances who are living the "high life" at the moment.
 - Perhaps we're tempted to search for a sin in someone else's unfortunate situation. What did they do to bring this on themselves? They must deserve it! They must have been too proud! Something inside human nature makes us quick to jump off people's bandwagon in their hour of trial.

Are you only a "fair weather friend?"
May God forgive us for those times!

May he lead us to seek out those we know in their hour of trial. May we be available to them. May we listen to them. May we comfort and encourage them. May we give godly counsel to them. May we pray with them and show them our love and affection!

2 – Jonathan gives us another example of true friendship. He also gave tangible assistance to David in his needs. We read in 1 Samuel 20, "David took an oath and said, 'Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said to himself, 'Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved.' Yet as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death.'" Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you."

What were David's needs? In the chapter before our reading David had been pursued by Saul, but the Lord had intervened in a miraculous way to save him. David needed to know if Saul's intentions remained the same. And if so, he needed to show Jonathan that Saul

indeed intended to harm him. And if that were so, he would need assistance to flee safely.

What was Jonathan's attitude?

"Whatever you want me to do, I'll do it for you." He was ready not only with his comfort, but also with help. David had a plan to see what Saul's intentions were. Coming soon was the festival of the New Moon, which the Old Testament Israelites celebrated once a year with extended feasting. David would normally have attended this at the king's court. Since Saul intended to keep his intentions from Jonathan he wouldn't try to harm David there. David proposed that he skip the first day of the feast, and then the second. Jonathan could tell Saul that he had done it to be with his family, and then see what his father's reaction was. If Saul wasn't too concerned, then perhaps he had had a change of heart. If Saul blew his stack, Jonathan would know that his father indeed intended to kill David.

What was Jonathan's attitude toward David's plan? He was willing to lend his aid. We see tangible ways that Jonathan helped David as the next days came:

- Jonathan spoke up to defend David to his father
- He endured rebuke because of his words
- He almost took a javelin in the heart for David
- He stifled his anger
- He told David about his father's attitude
- And he helped David escape

Jonathan assisted with David's needs.

Are you a true friend? It's one thing to lend your time and your ear to an acquaintance when they need it, but what about your help? Can we be a true friend like Jonathan? How often have fellow Christians been slandered or defamed in your presence? Proverbs 31 tells us: *"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."* Will you be tempted to be silent? Or to give a half-hearted attempt to defend your acquaintance, so that you can later say, "I did my duty." May we take

Jonathan's example to heart, speak up courageously, and put up a fight for them, perhaps even incurring the wrath of those who are defaming them!

Also, what about the bodily needs of your acquaintance? Will you be a true friend? Will you lend real aid? Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan shows an example of giving tangible help. What happened when the beaten man needed aid? *"A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him."* (Luke 10:31-34) **How much more may we be ready to lend aid to one we know, one that we claim as a friend!**

3 – Our example in Jonathan goes one step farther. Not only does it speak of being present in the hour of trial and assisting with another's needs. We also see sacrifice on the part of Jonathan for David's benefit.

What was Jonathan's sacrifice? Think about that for a moment. Jonathan was the heir apparent to the throne. He was the prince. He normally would have been the one to succeed his father, the king. He might have ambitiously presumed, "If David were only out of the way, I could be the king!" But we see none of that. Jonathan knew and accepted that David was to be the next king. He was loyal to the side of right. He did not succumb to jealousy. When he said to David, "Let's go out to the field," he did it with a different intention than Cain had when he said that to Abel years before. Jonathan sacrificed his ambitions because he knew the Lord's will.

This did not come without consequences. He endured a javelin thrown in his direction. And what danger would he encounter if Saul found out he was out in the field talking to David? For the rest of his life, Jonathan would be caught between the strange world of his father's demise and David's impending kingship until he would fall in battle on the last battlefield his father would also fight

on. Jesus would later say, “*Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*” (John 15:13) **Jonathan sacrificed for David’s benefit.**

Are you a true friend? Would you sacrifice something for an acquaintance?

- Would you sacrifice good position?
- Your security?
- Your time?
- Your money?
- Your comfort?
- Your life?

In his book “*Written in Blood*,” Robert Coleman tells the story of a little boy whose sister needed a blood transfusion. The doctor explained that she had the same disease the boy had recovered from two years earlier. Her only chance for recovery was a transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the disease. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was the ideal donor.

“Would you give your blood to Mary?” the doctor asked. Johnny hesitated. His lower lip started to tremble. Then he smiled and said, “Sure, for my sister.” Soon the two children were wheeled into the hospital room - Mary, pale and thin; Johnny, robust and healthy. Neither spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny grinned. As the nurse inserted the needle into his arm, Johnny’s smile faded. He watched the blood flow through the tube. With the ordeal almost over, his voice, slightly shaky, broke the silence. “Doctor, when do I die?” Only then did the doctor realize why Johnny had hesitated, why his lip had trembled when he’d agreed to donate his blood. He’d thought giving his blood to his sister meant giving up his life. In that brief moment, he’d made his great decision to sacrifice his own benefit for hers!

(Source: Thomas Lindberg)

When we reach these depths of true friendship, such sacrifice seems impossible to consider. And humanly, it is. But we see the example and inspiration to show true friendship in someone who is greater than a mere mortal. After all, whom does this sound like? Whom is Jonathan imitating? What great Friend do we have? What Friend has been there for us in our hour of trial? What Friend has assisted in our need? What Friend has sacrificed for our benefit? You know. These are all

characteristics of our truest Friend, Jesus Christ. Our greatest need was for a Savior. In our sinful condition, we were helpless. We could not save ourselves. We were pursued by our enemies: Satan, sin, guilt, and death.

However, our truest Friend left his place of comfort and came to sacrifice his life for us on the cross. He sacrificed himself for our benefit! Jesus said, “*The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life - only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.*” (John 10:17,18) Because of him, we’re forgiven our sins, even the sin of neglecting to be a true friend. And because of him we will live forever as kings with him in heaven. **“What a Friend we have in Jesus! All our sins and griefs to bear...”**

This, dear friends, will be our inspiration and motivation to be true friends to others! For we had a friend when we needed one.

Finally, who wouldn’t want a friend like Jonathan? As we close our look at these verses today, I think many of us put our feet in the sandals of David and marvel that someone else might be such a friend to us. But today, may we look at ourselves like we are Jonathan, looking at those we know to whom we can be a true friend, inspired by his example and the example of Jesus our Savior! Amen.

Sermon outline and thoughts gleaned from a sermon

by Pastor E.F. Tonn, *Concordia Pulpit*, 1935.