

A Month of UN-Sundays: Unfailing

August 9, 2020

Bendersville & Wenksville United Methodist Churches

1 Chronicles 28:1-10, 20-21

Psalm 51:1-12

So last week we started a new series of sermons titled “A Month of UN-Sundays.” During this space and time in history, when we are systematically having to UNdo a lot in our lives, and we may be finding ourselves a bit UNdone as a result, more than a few of us have found ourselves battling frustration, isolation, heightened depression and anxiety as it feels like so much of life has UNraveled. And all these feelings are normal, and natural, and understandable in light of life right now. But they are not pleasant. And as overwhelming and all-consuming as they can sometimes be, they are also not the whole story.

So this month, as a way of refocusing our attention, we are fixing our gaze not on everything that we have had to let go of – not on all the UNs of our lives, but instead on the beautiful mystery of who God is, and the UNs of God who speaks into our life and world right now. Last week we explored Psalm 136 – “God’s steadfast love endures forever.” And we were reminded that no matter WHAT in life – God is UNrelenting. God never stops. God never gives up. God always and forever seeks after us and draws us in close.

Today our Psalm is very different. *Very* different. Throughout most of the Psalms, we don’t really know who wrote each one. Or when they were written. Or what might have been going on in the life of the Psalmist that made him or her write down each prayer. Some of them give us a few clues – like the Psalms that refer to Babylon were probably written sometime around the exile in response to the pain that the Israelites were feeling in being forced out of their homes. But in most cases, we just don’t know.

Today’s Psalm is different, though. Because we are pretty sure we know exactly who wrote it, and why. And this Psalm is part of a big, juicy story that is probably familiar to many of us. It’s the story of King David.

If you will remember, David was Israel’s second king, but the first king that God himself actually chose. David didn’t exactly look the part of a king – he was small in stature and came from a meager beginning, but he was nevertheless the greatest king that Israel ever had. And even better, he was “a man after God’s own heart.” He led Israel well, and faithfully, and Israel grew big and strong and powerful as a result.

During one particularly sweet time when things were going great, David looks around at his life, and his kingdom, and thinks “This just isn’t right. I have this beautiful palace to

live in, but all God has is this little ramshackle tabernacle – a glorified tent left over from our wilderness wanderings. How about I build God a Temple? Something beautiful and fitting of this amazing God who we serve?”

And God’s response is interesting. God says “No.” Or at least, “Not right now.” And God gives David a few reasons for that. First, God is a God who goes wherever the people go. God doesn’t want to be tied down to a building. And second, if Israel builds a Temple, God wants that Temple to be a place of peace and rest for all who come there. David, as fabulous of a king as he was, was not a king of peace. He was a king of war, who led his country into one battle after another. Which was exactly what he needed to do, and exactly what God led him to do, but nevertheless it made him exactly the *wrong* man to construct a house for God that represented peace. “One of your descendants will be the one to build a Temple,” God tells David.

And then, I think there is a third reason that God tells David “No. Not now.” This isn’t spelled out anywhere in scripture, so it is pure speculation on my end. But I think maybe God knows the turn that David’s life is about to take. God knows that David’s life is about to spiral downhill, and that now is not the time to start a grand, magnificent project.

And that’s exactly what happened. Just four chapters after this conversation with God, David sees another man’s wife and decides that he “has to have her.” He takes what he wants, and then tries to cover his tracks and in the process he has an innocent and faithful man murdered on the battlefield. And then, he thinks he has gotten away with it until the prophet Nathan confronts David and reminds him that God saw everything that just went down and that God is not pleased.

Now, fortunately for David, he takes correction well. And this confrontation led him into a place of deep repentance. Psalm 51 is his prayer of repentance – his deep plea that God would forgive him for his total and complete failure as a king and as a child of God. Unfortunately for him, the consequences of his actions would be severe and he would never fully recover from them. His family would crumble from within. He would lose his “pizzaz” as a king. And he would fall into a deep depression that would last him the rest of his life.

So our scripture from 1 Chronicles is a scene from many years later. David and Bathsheba’s child has died, and they have had another son, Solomon, who is now all grown up. David is an old man and he’s getting close to the end of his life, and he is preparing to “pass the torch” to his son. And as he gathers all of the kingdom together for this solemn assembly he shares with everyone gathered his dying wish. He wishes for Solomon to build the Temple that he, David, never had the chance to build. He wants his son to pick up where he left off, years ago, in those days when the kingdom was still strong and the family was still intact. He longs for Solomon to do what he himself

couldn't – to lead a mighty kingdom free from regret, free from failure, free from the weight of the sin that had brought David down. And the Temple was to be the symbol of God's abiding presence with the people; a place of peace; a place of rest and respite from all of life's most painful struggles. Rest from the struggles that David had come to know far too well.

"Be strong and of good courage," David tells Solomon. "Do not be afraid or dismayed; for the Lord God, *my God*, is with you. *He will not fail you or forsake you* until all the work for the service of the house of the Lord is finished."

This is a really interesting statement. Anyone other than King David, might look at their life, and see how everything just went *wrong* after that indiscretion with Bathsheba. Anyone else would look at the chaos in their family, and look at their own failing health, and look at how hard life has gotten, and say, "where has God gone? Why has God abandoned me? Has God broken his promise to me? Why does God feel so far away? God has failed me." And then anybody else would grow jaded and bitter with God as a result.

But King David isn't just anybody. Even after Nathan's harsh words to David, even after David's horrible fall into brokenness and despair, David remains a man after God's own heart. And David knows exactly what had happened. It wasn't God who failed David. It was David who failed God. "For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me," David prays. "You are justified in your sentence." And then he later goes on to plead with God, "Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me."

"I *know* I failed, God," David cries out. "I know I let you down. It feels like there is nothing good left inside of me. But please, I beg you, *please* don't leave me now. Despite *my* failure, despite *my* sin, wash me clean. Renew me. Restore me. Please don't stop being my God."

And decades later, half a lifetime later – a lifetime of struggles and challenges and major hurdles to overcome later, David speaks to his son Solomon, the man who is about to inherit the kingdom, and he says to him maybe some of the most powerful words that he can: "God will not fail you or forsake you." In his prayers, in his pleas for mercy, in his brokenness, and through all of these many years of struggle David has learned that there is something fundamental about God that Solomon absolutely must know before he steps up as king: God is UNfailing. We might make mistakes. Goodness knows David make his share of mistakes. We might experience moments of failure – or big moments of failure. And we might experience tremendous pain as a result. Life might take really sour turns, either as a direct result of our own sinfulness or just because we live in a broken world and struggles happen. But through it all, no matter what, regardless of whether life turns out like we had hoped it would or not, no matter the twists and turns

that life takes, we have a God who is first and foremost UNrelenting and therefore will not stop seeking after us, and God is also UNfailing. The work that God starts, God will finish. When God sets his mind to something, God will bring that something to completion.

And God has set his mind upon *us*. God somehow, for some reason unknown to any of us, has decided that his primary focus will be on restoring *us*, on loving *us*, on saving *us*, on redeeming *us*. And what God starts, God finishes. God is UNfailing. When God has determined that despite *our* failures we are not beyond redemption, God will carry out that redeeming work until he has finished. Until we have gotten the message. Even if, like King David, we can't articulate that hope until decades later, and we look back at our life and are able to say that, yes, even and especially through the struggle, God was, in fact there, it was just hard to see it while we were in the thick of it. God will bring his UNfailing work to completion, even if that work means becoming incarnate as one of us and experiencing the joys and trials of life through our eyes and then going to the grave and back again – for *us*. God will do it, because *God's love never fails*.

Friends, this is an important message for us today. Because if we let the news media, or our Facebook feeds, or our political rhetoric, or our worst-case-scenario brains write the story, we would have ourselves believing in an instant that the world is broken beyond all repair and there is no hope left. King David had himself believing that from time to time. Believing that God had abandoned him. Believing that life would never be the same again. Believing that the dreams that he had held back in his youth – back in his glory days – dreams like building a temple and ruling over a mighty kingdom – had just gone somewhere to die.

But this is not the whole story. It's not even half of the story. It's *part* of the story, but just a small *part* of it. The bigger – and far more important – story is the part that we can't always see and don't always notice and far too often forget. The part that David knew and affirmed in his last days. That despite all evidence to the contrary – regardless of how hard and overwhelming the struggles may get and how hopeless life might feel, "Do not be afraid or dismayed; for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you."

And because God never fails, the day is coming when God will tell the Solomons of the world that the time is right to build that temple. To get on with life not just as it was before, but even *better* than it was before, with the benefit of the wisdom that we have gained as a result of what we have walked through. The time is coming when our hopes and dreams will be restored. When this set of struggles will come to an end. And on that day, the unrelenting, unfailing, matchless love of God will pour out upon all of us and be positively undeniable.