

**Fifth Sunday after the Pentecost**  
**June 27, 2021**  
**Southampton, MA**

**Scripture:** 2 Samuel 1: 1, 17-27

On the surface David delivered a glorious funeral oration for Saul and Jonathan, who died battling the Philistines (1 Samuel 31:1-7). The Philistines routed Saul's forces. They killed Jonathan and his two brothers, Abinadav and Malkishua. Saul not wanting to die at the hands of the Philistines fell on his sword.

We would expect David to extol the death of the king and his son in heroic terms. Underneath, though, lay interlocked conflicts both political and familial.

Long before the battle, Saul knew he lost God's support as king because he did not follow God's order to utterly destroy the Amalekites. (1 Samuel 15) David would succeed Saul (1 Samuel 16) and proved himself an able warrior when he killed Goliath. (1 Samuel 17) After David's victory, this narrative twisted and turned. Though initially loving David, Saul's ego and paranoia led him to plot David's death. Though in danger, David did not react in kind and at one point spared Saul's life when he came across Saul relieving himself in a cave. Meanwhile, Saul's children, Jonathan and Michal, also loved David. In one instance, Jonathan thwarted Saul's plan to kill David. Their intense friendship has been a touchstone for queer theologians who see their relationship as being homoerotic or homosexual. Michal's love for David led her father to devise a scheme to kill him. Rather than seek a bride price, Saul asked David to produce 100 Philistine foreskins. After delivering 200 foreskins, he married her. She deceived her father to save David after Saul tried to kill him with a spear.

Despite Jonathan and Michal loving David, he did not express his love for them with the same ardor. (Later, Michal came to despise David.) That raised a question, which leads to the political.

As a warrior, David demonstrated his prowess. Jonathan, who also was successful in battle, ceded his armor to David, which symbolically shifted his allegiance from Saul to David, implicitly recognizing David's eventual kingship. Furthermore, the word love had multiple meanings in Hebrew depending upon the context. Love as kinship. Love as friendship. Love as between king and subject, like Saul and David.

With Saul dead, we would expect David to eulogize him and Jonathan in his role as de facto king. It was part of the ritual transfer of power, the political. However, when we consider the back story, this is a eulogy for his father-in-law and brother-in-law, the familial. Yet, the family relationship was problematic. How do you eulogize the man who attempted several times to kill you? As for eulogizing Jonathan, this was not just a fellow warrior, this was a man who saved his life, switched his allegiance from this father to him, and arguably might have been sexually attractive.

This was a difficult task for David. Even for a man as accomplished as he, he had to say the right words regardless what was in his heart.

Grief is not easy. I tell people that grief is complex and that there is no one or proper way to grieve. Years ago about a year after one of my patients died, her daughter called me seeking guidance. She told me that though she was sad and missed her mother, she was not crying every night. She wondered if she was grieving properly. She said her grief was not interfering with her daily life. I told her that she was fine and that we should not think we must grieve as they do in the movies.

Just as David put on a public face of grief, we do as well. It's OK initially to look sad, but culturally we're expected to put all of that behind us once the funeral is over. Yet, we can be a hot mess inside. Conversely, when we've had a problematic relationship with the deceased, we may not look sufficiently sad immediately following death.

Since we don't know the entire back story, the last thing to say to someone who is grieving is "I know how you feel." When we think of David's back story, what was he feeling in that moment? The best we can do is listen and for that moment help shoulder the burden and affirm their feelings.

In grief, treat yourself gently. Do what you can to get through each day. Accept that grief is a journey lasting anywhere from 18 to 24 months. Seek support and understand that counseling is appropriate, especially if your grief interferes with your daily functions.

Grief is a healing process. Healthy grieving enables us to move forward into a new normal. That new normal is a new life without our loved one. In other words, healthy grieving leads to resurrection.