

## Two Tales of Friendship: Jonathan and David, and Mary and Elizabeth

1. Welcome to Friendsgiving. (King Conrad III and the women of Weinsberg in 1140) Friends carry each other...and today is a celebration of us carrying each other from what and where we were to what and where we are today. It is also a pledge to continue to carry each other from this day forward.
2. There are a few stories in scripture that illustrate true friendship. We have chosen two today, one of which is given a lot more space in scripture than the other. So, let's start with that one.
3. We know the first king of Israel, King Saul. Jonathan was his son and next in line for the throne. We don't talk about him very much but the Bible does. If you'd like to know more about him but have limited time, read First Samuel 14, 19, and 20. You could also add Second Samuel 1:17-27 to read David's lament when he hears about the death of Jonathan.
4. Jonathan would have been a serious upgrade when it came to kings. Saul had started well but went off into self-centered behavior, ignoring the God who called him out of obscurity and into the kingship. Saul might have developed mental illness or a chronic, debilitating pain...but something went wrong.
5. Enter Jonathan. 1<sup>st</sup> Sam. 13:3 and 14:1-13 says that Jonathan was a great warrior who was honest, ethical, and just. Sometime after David's defeat of Goliath, Jonathan and David form a friendship. To be honest, it seems a true friendship but David prospered from it while Jonathan did not.
6. In fact, Jonathan started the friendship by giving David his robe and armor (1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 18:1-3), a formal gesture which meant Jonathan was giving David his position in life, marking David as the true heir to

the throne. In a preshadowing of the Golden Rule, Jonathan is said to have loved David "as himself."

7. When David is brought into Saul's service, Jonathan continues to be David's friend. In First Samuel 16, he expressly states that David is the true king of Israel. I cannot stress enough how shocking this was in the Bronze Age.
8. When Saul drives David away, Jonathan works to restore David to the King's good graces. Jonathan makes a formal covenant with David to support him and help him in any way. When Saul's attacks on David ratchet up, Jonathan asks David to show mercy to him and to his lineage. David agrees to do so and, in fact, does.
9. David refrains from killing Saul when he has the chance and, later, after Jonathan's death, David reaches out to his son and takes care of him. It is a friendship that survives death. Death? Yes, Jonathan obediently follows his father when King Saul demanded a strike against the Philistines. Both of them die in that battle.
10. Jonathan is a fascinating character and I wish we knew more about him. His dedication to bravery, courage, and doing what is right went beyond David. When he single-handedly fought against a large squad of Philistines, he told his armor bearer to climb up behind him, not in front of him. (kings sending the expendables first, pawns on a chess board).
11. In that battle, Jonathan and his armor bearer killed 20 men. Their fierceness in battle and an earthquake that hit during it made the Philistines panic and flee. Jonathan could have brought David along as an equal and they would have been awesome – the cliff climber and the giant killer. But Jonathan was humble and dedicated to the will of God.

12. He prayed to God, thought about God, and sought God's will. He had every reason to believe he was the chosen one and that his path was already decided...but he was ready to give it all up if God willed it.
13. And then...there is Mary. We talked about her in a sermon a month or two back. She is in a very tight knit society that follows the rules and knows those who don't. Before the events of Christmas Eve and the Advent, she is a young girl, pregnant, not quite married, and she will soon "show."
14. In her society, this was intolerable. They didn't stone girls who were pregnant outside of marriage; the Romans didn't allow that and we don't have much in the way of evidence that they would have done so at that point in history anyway. Still, her reputation was shot and, as we said in that sermon, Mary never had a good day.
15. For many, many years in Ireland, when a girl became pregnant outside of marriage, the choices were two and only two: quickly marry the father or go to England or Scotland until the baby was born, give it up for adoption, and then, maybe, you can come back. It was brutal, but the plan was to keep the larger community from knowing about the "sin" of the girl.
16. Mary was not able to stay in her village, in her home, or with Joseph during these months. She went to Elizabeth, her friend. Yes, she was a relative but, surely, we all know that relatives are NOT always the safe place to run. Elizabeth believed Mary. Elizabeth took her in and, though the scripture never brings it up, there would absolutely have been a cost – and not just food and board.
17. Elizabeth is the wife of a priest. Some people would have refused to accept Zechariah as a true priest after they harbored Mary and treated her well. Yet, no mention because, to them, it was not out

of character. This is who they were. No wonder God chose to send John the Baptist through them! He would also be strong and speak the truth without fear and without limits. Wonder where he learned that...?

18. And that is where we are today. This is our takeaway. We make friends with others as Jesus made friends with us, accepting them, loving them, and sheltering them. We share our goods just as the earliest Christians did in Acts 2 and throughout the NT.

19. We also befriend those who are not in our church, who do not believe in God, and who never thought they'd have a believing friend. Living the life of a Christian means following the steps of the One, the True God, and the Son of God, who crossed the universe to befriend us...even at great cost.

20. Go thou, and do likewise.