

Access for All  
Scripture: 2 Samuel 4:4; 9:1–13  
Rev. Henry Pascual

*Prayer: Your Word, O God, is our refuge and guide. Open our minds and hearts as we listen to your Word. Lead us to understand it and live it out in our lives. Amen.*

In the United Church of Christ, every second Sunday in October is designated as *Access Sunday*. On this day, UCC churches join together to celebrate the gifts people with disabilities bring to our congregations. It is also an opportunity to recognize the strides we have made toward greater inclusion and accessibility for all, while remembering that there is still more work to do.

*Access Sunday* invites us to look honestly at how we live together as the body of Christ. So often, our society prizes independence, self-reliance, and physical strength above all. We are taught to believe that being strong means not needing anyone else. But Scripture offers us a different understanding of what it means to be human.

The truth is, none of us is completely self-sufficient. As theologian Stanley Hauerwas reminds us, dependence is not a failure of being human; it is part of being human. We need one another, and our lives are deeply connected.<sup>1</sup>

This truth comes alive in the story of Mephibosheth.

Second Samuel 4:4 tells us that Mephibosheth was only five years old when news came that his father, Jonathan, and grandfather, King Saul, had died in the battle against the Philistines (1 Sam. 31:1-6). His nurse picked him up and fled. In the rush to escape, he fell and became disabled in both feet (2 Sam. 4:4).

Years later, Mephibosheth was living in exile. He was a member of the family that once ruled Israel, but now lived on the margins.

---

<sup>1</sup> John Swinton, ed., *Critical Reflections on Stanley Hauerwas' Theology of Disability: Disabling Society, Enabling Theology*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2004.

Then King David asked a question that would change his life: “Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” (2 Samuel 9:1). Jonathan and David formed a close bond while David was serving in the palace of King Saul (1 Sam. 18:1-4).

David remembered his friend Jonathan and the covenant he made with him (1 Samuel 20:14-15). And because of that promise, he went looking for Jonathan’s son.

This is where our story begins.

David had every reason to forget Saul’s family. King Saul had been his enemy, and Jonathan was gone. The old royal family had lost its power.

But David remembered his covenant with Jonathan to show kindness to Jonathan and his descendants.

So David asked, “Is there anyone left of the house of Saul?”

There was. His name was Mephibosheth.

He was living in *Lo-debar*, a name that literally means “no pasture,” meaning “barren,” a place of nothingness. It was a fitting picture of someone living far from the center of power and privilege.

When Mephibosheth came before David, he described himself as a “dead dog.” In the ancient Near East, this was an expression of complete self-deprecation and powerlessness, when you had zero power. Mephibosheth was tucked away in an obscure place, hidden and forgotten. He saw himself as someone who had little value and, more importantly, not a threat to David’s throne or to anyone.

But David didn’t see him as a threat. He sent for Mephibosheth. He refused to let Mephibosheth remain forgotten and living on the margins.

And that matters for us today.

Because sometimes people are missing from our churches not because they don't want to come, but because of barriers that make participation difficult or impossible. Entrances that are hard to navigate. A staircase without a ramp. A website that isn’t accessible to everyone. Limited

communication options, or assumptions that disabled people have little to contribute to the life and ministry of the church.

To be sure, our congregation, like many others, has taken important steps toward greater inclusion and accessibility. We have made changes to our facilities and worship spaces, both in our online and in-person services, to help people participate more fully. These are important signs of our commitment to being a welcoming church.

But inclusion is not a one-time project. It is an ongoing commitment.

We must keep asking ourselves: Who might still be left out? What barriers remain? What changes can we make so that everyone has the opportunity to participate fully?

Like David, we must be willing to look beyond those already present and reach out to those who may have been forgotten or overlooked.

When Mephibosheth appears before King David, he has every reason to be afraid. He does not know what the king will do to him.

But David says something unexpected:

“Do not be afraid, for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan.” (2 Samuel 9:7)

The Hebrew word for kindness here is *chesed*. It speaks of steadfast love, faithfulness, and a commitment to a relationship.

David does more than offer Mephibosheth a gift. He restores Saul’s land to him and gives him a permanent place at the royal table.

This is more than charity. It is an act of covenant love. Charity can sometimes create a relationship in which one person gives and another receives. The giver has the resources, while the recipient is expected to be grateful.

But David does something deeper. He restores Mephibosheth’s place in the community. He gives him dignity, honor, and belonging.

That distinction matters for the church. People with disabilities are not simply recipients of our kindness. They are active partners in our shared life, far beyond being mere recipients of charity. They are members of the body of Christ, with gifts, voices, relationships, and leadership to offer.

Perhaps the most beautiful part of this story is what David does next.

He tells Mephibosheth that he will eat at the king's table continually. The passage repeats this detail, reminding us that Mephibosheth ate at David's table "like one of the king's sons."

Think about what that means.

Mephibosheth does not receive a temporary invitation. He is given a permanent place. He is no longer treated as an outsider who is being shown a little kindness. He is welcomed as part of the royal household.

This is the kind of welcome the church is called to offer.

In her book *Copious Hosting: A Theology of Access for People with Disabilities*, Jennie Weiss Block reminds us that access involves much more than removing physical barriers, beyond simply removing physical barriers, beyond physical modifications like wheelchair ramps, accessible restrooms, or braille hymnals. She defines genuine access as a spiritual and relational posture consisting of **hospitality, authentic relationship, friendship, and full, meaningful participation** in the liturgical and social life of the community.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, accessibility is not simply about making sure someone can enter the building. It's more than opening doors. It is also about making sure they can participate once they are inside.

Can they hear and understand the service? Can they communicate in ways that work for them? Can they join church activities, volunteer, and serve in leadership? Can they help shape decisions that affect the congregation?

And just as importantly, can they be known and valued for who they are?

---

<sup>2</sup> Jennie Weiss Block, *Copious Hosting: A Theology of Access for People with Disabilities* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 130.

We must not treat disability as a problem that needs to be fixed before someone can belong. Nor should we see people with disabilities only as people who need our help. They are also ministers of God's grace to us. They bring gifts that enrich our common life.

And when the church excludes people with disabilities, the whole body suffers.

So the question is not simply, “How can we make room for people with disabilities?” The deeper question is, “How can we become a community where everyone has a **meaningful place**?”

Friends, the gospel reminds us that human dignity is not measured by strength, independence, or productivity. In the risen Christ, we see that wounds do not diminish our humanity, and disability does not diminish God's image. Like Mephibosheth, we do not have to change to belong—we already have a place at the table.

So let us remove every barrier to full inclusion and participation. True inclusion goes beyond opening the door—it makes room for a community where everyone truly belongs **because we are all better when everyone has a place.**

May we become a church where every person can say: *I am seen. I am valued. I am needed. I belong.* That is the good news: **Access for all.** Thanks be to God. Amen.