

MESSING UP, DRESSING DOWN AND THE ONGOING LOVE OF GOD
Sermon for Pentecost 9B, Proper 13: 2Sam 11: 26-12:13a
LPC, 8/2/09

I have been in withdrawal for the past couple of weeks after the conclusion of the Tour de France. As you know, the Tour de France is the world's most prestigious bike race, going on for three weeks over some of the most challenging and beautiful terrain in France.

Even if you don't follow the Tour de France, you have certainly heard of Lance Armstrong. Lance Armstrong is the American cyclist who overcame cancer to win the Tour de France seven times. After his historic seventh win, he retired for three or four years, but came back to race again this year. One of his reasons was to promote his Livestrong Foundation, which supports people with cancer. Lance is a hero, but his participation in this year's Tour was marred by an unspoken but obvious resentment of Alberto Contador, the Tour's winner. This ungraciousness does not seem worthy of man who has accomplished so much.

We really don't want our heroes to be complex, to mess up. Several of you spoke to me last week in this vein about King David. In last week's story, King David took another man's wife, got her pregnant, and then had her husband killed. This is our hero King David? The brave young man who stood up to the giant Goliath? The beloved King? The unifier and defender of Israel? The man whom the Bible calls "a man after God's own heart?"

The fact of the matter is that our hero David has done some really really bad things. He has hurt a lot of people. In today's lesson, we hear the continuation of that story. We are told that God is displeased by David's actions of adultery and conspiracy to murder.

This at least is reassuring. No matter how much God loves David, God strongly disapproves of his hurting and killing people. God sends the prophet Nathan, an advisor of David's, to present God's case in a parable about a lamb.

When David hears the story about a rich man killing the pet of a poor man because he couldn't be bothered to take an animal from his own flocks, David is infuriated and demands retribution be made. Nathan then delivers the zinger, "You are the man!" Nathan further tells David that because David has broken faith so badly, David will pay a heavy price. He will have strife within his own family for the rest of his life. If you read the rest of the book of Samuel you will see this born out.

You will also see that God never stops loving David. God has forged a relationship with David, and God remains faithful to David, even though David has been unfaithful to God. God has promised that David's family will continue to rule over Israel and God keeps his promise to David, even though David has messed up.

As Christians, we believe that God's promise continues through David's descendents to Jesus Christ, who continues to rule the earth even today. God has remained faithful to God's people, though God's people have broken faith, in small ways and large, throughout the ages.

People mess up. God keeps faith. God continues to love God's people. God keeps God's promises to God's people. Again and again God forgives. Again and again God gives people a second chance to be the people God intended them to be.

Notice that in David's case, God's keeping faith does not mean David is off the hook. David must bear the consequences of his evil actions. God's loving David does not mean David gets off scot free. God's loving David means God never gives up on David.

This is a good message for a baptism day. In baptism, Elizabeth and Jacob are adopted by God, chosen by God to be God's children. In baptism, God promises that God will never stop loving Elizabeth and Jacob. God will never give up on them, even when they mess up. And they probably will mess up.

We all mess up. You are the man. You are the woman. I am the woman. We mess up whenever we think only of what's good for us in the short run, and forget that God created the world to be good for everybody. We mess up when we forget God. We mess up when we try to do things on our own, without God.

When we mess up, it's likely there will be consequences to deal with, though sometimes we are completely and instantaneously forgiven. What's true all the time for us, as baptized persons, is that we are God's children. And God never gives up on us.