

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The bible introduces David's nephew Abishai in today's first reading. Abishai asks permission to kill King Saul so that David may begin his rule. David stops him.

Later Abishai would kill Abner in retaliation for Abner killing Abishai's brother Asahel. When Saul's relative Shimei cursed David and threw stones at him, Abishai offered to kill him. David restrained him. During a rebellion, David ordered Abishai to deal gently with Absalom. Abishai led an army that overcame the Ammonites and killed 18,000 Edomites. He killed a Philistine soldier who attacked David. When Shimei reappeared, Abishai again offered to kill him, and David restrained him. Abishai is childlike in resorting to violence and murder. Long before video games and R-rated movies, he learned the best way to handle your enemies is to kill them.

We hear about him today because our survey of Luke's gospel has reached the point where Jesus commands his disciples to love their enemies. Later, when Jesus' enemies arrested him, he did not resist. He even forgave them from the cross.

David had a similar insight in today's passage. Saul's fortunes were diminishing. Even the Lord regretted choosing Saul to be king. Saul had amassed an army of 3000 to hunt down David and eliminate his opposition. David had 300 soldiers. But one night in the desert of Ziph, Saul and his soldiers built a barricade, entered the place they thought was safe, and all fell into a deep sleep, no one keeping guard. When David and his nephew stumbled upon them, they noticed at Saul's head his water jug, which sustained his life, and his spear, which imposed death. Abishai interpreted the scene as a sign of God's favor and asked permission to kill the king. David said no; even though Saul was a terrible ruler, he was the ruler. God had authorized the anointing of Saul, and God would deal with him; David would not. So David simply borrowed the spear and water jug and scrambled away to a safe distance. From there he called back to Saul's troops to awaken them, behold how David could have killed Saul, and invited them to come retrieve the spear. He handed back his enemy's weapon.

Saul realized David was the better man, and eventually David took the throne.

David's conclusion is worth remembering: "The LORD will reward each man for his justice and faithfulness." Saul had been unjust and faithless, David had been just and faithful, and the Lord rewarded each man accordingly.

We know it is better to do good than to do evil, to think kindly of others rather than judge them harshly, but too often we are like Abishai who never learned his lesson. He kept slinking back into the violent solutions his immature mind thought would settle disputes. When we dislike those who hold other views, argue with people we love, or hurt our enemies, we do well to remember Jesus' command to love and David's philosophy that the Lord will reward each person according to their justice and faithfulness. We don't have to punish everyone who disagrees with us. It's enough to act with faithfulness and leave the rewards to God.