

As we journey with David one last time, Israel is in the midst of a civil war; the kingdom is tearing itself apart. So is David's family. As the family goes, the nation goes. David leads one side, his son Absalom the other.

Remember the words from last week? "From now on the sword will never depart this house."

David calls his trusted, respected and loyal officers together, he asks them to spare Absalom from harm when they go out to battle. The fighting is terrible, 10's of 1000's of people die, but David's army is victorious.

As the soldiers move through the battleground, they come across Absalom riding a mule. As he seeks to escape, he rides under a large oak tree, whose branches lean close to the ground. As he goes, he gets wedged by the neck, the mule he is riding keeps on going. He is stuck and left hanging. David's soldiers close in.

In spite of all David has said to his officers, one of them mortally wounds Absalom and 10 of his soldiers finish him off. He is murdered, no matter what King David, his father, has said.

A messenger arrives at David's palace, with good news of the victory, and Absalom's death. David weeps and cries out, wishing for death himself.

David's sin against the Lord in his murder of Uriah, and taking of his wife Bathsheba, resulted in these words from Nathan the prophet, and here we see there outworking.

David's family and nation are torn apart, egos, personalities and factions wage war, do incalculable damage as they tear away mercilessly at one another, trying to get what they want.

This story is a moral tale for us all. All of us who live in families, are part of tribes or clans or iwis or communities, or nations. That if our own propensity for selfishness and sin is not curbed, then destruction is all that awaits us.

The story of David and Absalom is also our story. All of us are the product of everything that has happened to us, just like David and his son. Who of us has not felt real anger at someone, or something? Who of us has not experienced the pull of selfishness when confronted with the possibility of being left out? Or seen it in the choices made over affairs, alcohol or drug addiction, or simple pride?

Who of us has not seen or experienced these destructive forces in our families, those close to us, or known to us? Who of us has not experienced the war between husband and wife, parents and children, sons and daughters in law? Or the perennial Mother-in-law?

Who of us don't notice this every day in the newspaper or TV or however we get our news? The communities and nations torn apart by one group's selfishness and greed over another? Or by hatred and prejudice?

David and Absalom's story is as old as the garden of Eden, in Cain and Abel, it was brothers that first time, and we read it again today; Father and Son, violence, anger, passion, disregard, sadness, dishonesty, grief, murder, death and war.

We humans seem always to be at war; within ourselves, within our families, with our communities, and as nations. ...

The reading from Ephesians calls us to something else.

To truthfulness, honesty, encouragement, generosity, helpfulness, not giving the devil a look in, integrity, the putting aside of that which is unhelpful, peacefulness, kindness, tenderness and forgiveness.

What might have happened if these things had been present in David's relationship with Absalom?
Maybe nothing would have been different, maybe everything.

What might it be like if we lived this way within ourselves?

Maybe nothing would change, maybe everything.

What might have been different in relationship's you are have had, if these things were present?
Maybe nothing, maybe everything.

What might it be like if we could, as people, families, communities,
as tribes, clans, groups,

iwis and nations ... live like this?

Maybe nothing would be different ...

maybe ... everything?

Thanks be to God.

Amen.