Loved and Led
2 Samuel 5:1-5, 10

A Sermon
Delivered by
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Holy Father, may the word of my mouth and meditations of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord our strength and Redeemer, Amen.

Well Good Morning. I want to extend a special welcome to the Class of 2019 who are here worshipping with us this today, and hopefully seeing that there is a great family of faith who loves you, who’s proud of you, and who wants to lift you up – not only during Plebe Summer, but for the next four years of your life. For those who don’t know, my name is Chaplain Carey Cash and my role is to help make sure that as a chaplain team, we are taking care of all our Midshipmen; and that’s important to remember. As chaplains, our mission – Class of 19 – is you. Chaplains don’t command ships, although we love the sea. We don’t kick in doors with rifles, although who doesn’t love to go to the range and fire the 50 caliber. We don’t launch off carriers in F-18s, although we pray for those who do. Our mission is people; which is to say – our mission is you. You’re not a side-show or a secondary consideration. You are why we’re here. And I pray you know that today.

One of the real frustrations and sources of stress that Plebes wrestle with, year after year, is the issue of priorities and time management. I hear Plebes say all the time, “It seems that I’m always given more to do than I have time for.” Especially in the throes of Plebe Summer, it’s as if the detailers deliberately set you up to not be able to get everything done. And for those of you with the kind of personality that likes to move at your own pace in an orderly and organized fashion, this can be very frustrating, even overwhelming. Well, let me let you in on a little secret. This dilemma of being asked to do more than you’re able to, creates a situation where you have to begin to make choices – value judgments about what’s most important. If you’re given 5 things to do, and you only have time for 3 of them, something’s got to give. What do you do? How will you decide which tasks to carry out and which ones you’ll get to if there’s time? Of course all the while knowing that whatever you do, you’re going to get yelled at.

What the Naval Academy is introducing to you, is this thing called “prioritization.” And it’s a matter of great importance. In your career as a naval officer, you’re going to have to make hard and timely decisions. You’re going to have to decide which demands need your attention now, and which can wait or simply recede into the background. Well, what is true in Plebe Summer and the military is also true in the spiritual realm. In life you and me – all of us – will feel the weight and pull of countless demands, expectations, and influences. Some of these will
come from others; some, from the culture; and some, from ourselves. And the $64,000 dollar question is: What will you decide is the most important? What issues will take precedence in your life? What priorities will you make number one? It’s no small matter—this question, and the way you and I answer it will determine everything of consequence—both in this life, and the next.

Our passage of scripture this morning is all about a man who understood the urgency of getting his priorities right. His name is David. David is a Bible character that Sailors and Marines and Midshipmen love. For one, he was a warrior, a military man who knew what it was to go into harm’s way; who knew what it was to be in command, to lead. And so his life carries credibility to those of us who wear the uniform. But along with his fierce warrior-spirit, David was also a man of fierce faith and devotion to God. Half the Psalms are written by David. He was a man of great prayer and loyalty to the Lord. Perhaps this is why the Bible speaks more about David than any other person of all. Did you know that? More than Moses and Abraham, more than Peter and Paul…more than Jesus. More is written about David than any other person in all of salvation history. Clearly then, there’s a message: God wants you and me to know something about this man, about his character, what he valued, and where his priorities were. In our story this morning from 2nd Samuel 5, we witness David being installed as King over all of Israel. It’s a seminal moment in David’s life, a culminating moment for which all of his life has been preparing him. We see something of David’s greatness, and why so many were so willing to follow him as their leader. As such his life has a great deal to say to us.

To begin with, David inspired love and loyalty in those under him. When the leaders of the tribes of Israel came to David, they spoke some of the most profound words of devotion that a leader could ever hear from his or her subordinates. They said, “Behold, we are your bone and your flesh.” These are only words that can be spoken by men whose leader has loved and led them sacrificially—a leader who has bound himself to his people; cared for them. I was privileged to serve with the Marines in Iraq for the opening chapter of Operation Iraqi Freedom. And I was able to be privy to some outstanding examples of leadership. One Marine in particular was a Naval Academy graduate and rifle Company Commander. He was a large Marine—stood about 6’5. I had watched him in the course of three weeks lose two men killed in action. One, a 2nd LT Platoon commander; and the other, his Company Gunny: two very prominent Marines in that company. And what’s more, his company had sustained the lion-share of the 75 casualties that our battalion took when we invaded Baghdad. I watched this Company Commander fearlessly and tirelessly lead those young men in combat in the midst of great loss and without ever having time to grieve. Towards the end of our deployment, we were staying in the town of Ad-Diwaniyah, Iraq. And the place we were staying was basically in rubble and ruination as we’d overtaken it a few weeks earlier. I had decided to make a little home for myself in a bombed out office where I could counsel Marines and secure my gear. One day, while in my office, there was a knock on the door, and it was this Company Commander, who’d lost two men. I opened the door...there he stood in all of his battle-rattle. He asked if he could come in. He closed the door and stood there almost at attention; and for about two minutes, he lost it. He didn’t say anything, and neither did I. After about two minutes, he dried his eyes and went out to lead those Marines. What an image. This was David—a warrior, fierce and true; and
yet a leader who loved his people, bearing their losses as his very own, inspiring their love and loyalty in return. His men were bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. They were bound to him.

Second, David led from wherever God placed him in life. Notice that the leaders of the tribes come to him and say in effect, even though Saul was positionally their king, it was David they saw as their true leader. He was their shepherd and the one who’d earned their loyalty. In other words, David’s leadership flowed from something deeper than mere rank or position. It’s important to see that leadership and influence can happen anywhere and from whatever role you may be filling. No matter where you are in the organization, if God’s favor is in your life, you can be a person of great and enduring influence. This isn’t to say that we dismiss the offices that men and women hold over us…no. Romans says we are to “submit to all those authorities who are over us” (Romans 13:1). But we can still bloom right where you’re planted. What does the Apostle Paul say to young Timothy? “Let no one despise you for your youth, but rather set the example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). This was David. He bloomed where he was planted, shined were God placed him, led from whatever stage in life he found himself.

Third, David submitted himself to those who followed him. Our passage says that when “all the elders came to him…King David made a covenant with them before the Lord…” This, to me, is one of reasons why David was so loved. He didn’t wait for them to come to him, but took the first step and entered into covenant with them; he submitted himself to the same rule of law - God’s law - that he expected them to follow. He wouldn’t ask anything of his men that he himself would not do. I suppose as long as there have been civilizations, nations, and armies, there will be those in authority who exempt themselves from the rule of law – who excuse themselves from the inconvenient constraints and limits of society and rule by raw power. But a good leader knows that he or she is really not above their men and women at all; in fact they are called to serve them – to submit themselves to the same standards by which all the others are measured. And so it’s no wonder that David’s men loved him so much, and why they were so willing to follow him. They knew they were loved; and they know they were led by one in whom they could trust, one who had their very best interests at heart. And that is the deepest cry of every one of us – to be loved and led by one in whom we can place our trust. There’s one more point to make about David, and it’s the most important point of all.

For all his personal virtue, David was “a man after God’s own heart.” It was the single most determinative quality of his life! He was a man after God’s own heart. That’s what the Bible says of David. Of no one else does the Bible use these words. David knew what mattered most and in view of all the expectations that were thrust upon him in his life, David got the one thing right. He made the Lord his number one priority. And so we read in the very last verse of our passage that “David became greater and greater for the Lord God of hosts was with him.” There is an inscription carved above the front doors of The Citadel’s Summernal Chapel (where I went to school) that’s taken from Ecclesiastes 12. Etched deep in stone are the words: “Remember now Thy creator in the days of thy youth.” These words were written by David’s son, Solomon, but they could’ve been written by David because this was the secret to his
greatness. He remembered his creator in the days of his youth. Class of 2019, I want to say something just to you for a moment. There is a window of time in a young person’s life when we are more open to the things of God than we ever will be again. And that window, in a sense, is closing. Not that we won’t seek God again if we don’t now; but if we don’t during our youth, we are far more likely to grow cold and calloused to our need for the Lord, until one day we awaken to find we just don’t care anymore. I suppose there are death-bed conversions; but there aren’t many. And if we choose to wander away from God when we are young—as so many choose to do when they leave home from college—if we choose to do this, it is very possible that we will never care enough to come back to him again. That’s why the Scripture says, “Remember Thy creator in the days of thy youth…before the evil days come and the years draw near and you say I have no more delight in them. Remember Him [the Lord] before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed and the jar is shattered…and the dust returns to the earth…” (Ecclesiastes 12:1, 6-7). Before we get set in our ways, before our hearts become calloused to the things of God, our lives pulled and broken apart by the world, before we drift away…remember the Lord, make him first, draw a line in the sand, etch it in stone and say “I will honor the Lord.” “For those who honor me,” says the Lord, “I will honor, but the one who despises me, I will little esteem.” David honored the Lord. He made the Lord his first priority. And it made all the difference.

12 years ago, as I stood in the bombed out office in Iraq after that Company Commander had left, I began to reflect upon the Lord in my own life. I remember it vividly. As I sat there thinking about where I was in the world, how much God had protected me in the previous days, another knock came at the door. I don’t mean this in a literal way, but it was a knock on the door of my heart. On that day in April of 2003, the Lord Jesus came to that office and spoke to me. I didn’t see him with my eye; I didn’t hear audible words. But in language and images and a presence far more real than the ground under my feet, the Lord Jesus spoke. He said, “Carey, come to Me. Partake of me. My broken Body and my shed Blood for you. Trust in me. Enter into my love. Abide in me, and I will abide in you.” I have never felt more loved and led in all my life than in those moments in that bombed out office there on the edge of war.

Jesus comes to you today with the same words. Wherever you are in life, he comes and he says: “You are bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, and I have given my flesh for the life of the world. Abide in me and I in you and you will bear much fruit.”

We are – all of us – in a great spiritual conflict. We’re caught in the crossfire of conflicting priorities and demands and influences. And they’re all vying for our allegiance, clamoring for our loyalty, making their appeal upon our life. If you will make Jesus your first priority; if you’ll seek first the Kingdom of God, you’ll be more than a good leader, You’ll be loved and you’ll be led by the Lord himself. And from that place of intimacy and power and strength you’ll rise up to love and lead others to the glory of God. Amen.