

# Michal: Love's Longing

August 1, 2010  
2 Samuel 6: 14 – 22

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One of the joys of Summer is there is time for story. Movie makers know it as they prepare their blockbusters. Publishing companies know it, describing their latest books as companions for the beach or the plane. The county fair arrives with musical stars of the past and the orchestra at the Hollywood bowl serenades the night. The longer, warmer nights keep us outside where we meet others and share our stories. Even the workplace slows down, inviting those who produce together to speak of more than just the workload--to speak about what delights and moves the soul.

It is in the spirit of Summer storytelling that I invite you to enter into this sermon series of "Those who Loved David," listening well to the scriptures that speak of Michal, David's first wife today; Saul, the king who is soothed by David's music but later became David's fiercest enemy; and finally Jonathan, David's dearest friend (on the 22nd.)

As we listen, look not for a moral or even direction from God for how to be a better leader, person, spouse, child.... There will be time enough for that. We have no need today to prepare for a test. But it is important--no, it is essential to our soul--that we listen.

Brevard Childs at Yale Divinity is the founder of a school of Biblical inquiry called the Canonical approach. He argued convincingly it is more important to look faithfully at what is in the Bible, than it is to enter into discussion about why other books were left out. Childs claims that the Holy Spirit had something to do with the Bible's final form. I like him. He was an important voice during a time when moderns were seeking proof and discounting all that didn't fit with scholars' newest finds. He is important now because he doesn't allow us to throw away anything in the Bible, even those things we don't like. He challenges us to find a way to hear.

I'm told that a student once asked Professor Childs "how do I write a better exegesis paper?" Exegesis is a fancy word for creating a personal commentary on a scripture. He said, "Become a more interesting person."

Luckily, here at Community Church, Congregational, I am surrounded by interesting people. So as you listen to scripture, look for the synchronicities, those places where your emotion, your life, connects to the one who is speaking through scripture. Allow the Holy Spirit to move in you, in a way that is wholly part of you. I trust

that God will delight in forming you.

Today we turn to Michal, David's first wife, and the woman we met last time I preached. Last time I stood before you, David was in the midst of a spiritual and political ecstasy, spinning around, dancing before the Lord, when Michal peers out of her palace window. Michal stands inside a palace that speaks of her position and her wealth, an enviable window indeed. Yet, she is locked in and out of the celebration that is happening on the street. She is the outcast kept inside because her appearance would stop the dancing.

She seeks to straighten, to stand tall, even as she rightly senses that she can't enter in. She is Saul's daughter; she is the daughter of a dead king. Having no gargoyles with which to speak, the silence holds her hostage to her own thoughts. Are they thoughts of sadness about her lost position? Does she think about all she gave to David in her youth? Or does she seethe, wondering why he dances for them?

Michal is a fighter. Michal is the daughter of Saul, the king with a spear. With the cruelest sarcasm she can muster, in a passionate, politically suicidal move, she tries to cut him down, tries to turn his eyes toward her, tries to get him to enter into her battle.

"And Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and she said, 'How honored today is the king of Israel who has exposed himself today to the eyes of his servants' slave girls as some scurrilous fellow would expose himself!'" (2 Samuel 6:20)

And, David, the warrior who always wins in battle, deals the final blow saying,

"My house, the house of David is the one God has chosen, not the house of Saul. I will play before the Lord."

The scene ends with the epitaph, "Michal, daughter of Saul, had no child till her dying day."

This is the last we see or hear of Michal. It is the final detaching of the kingship from any of Saul's family.

On the one hand, Michal is the foil. She provides the opportunity for David to finally say, "I am king." But how colorful are her words. Like Thelma and Louise driving over the cliff, she gives David's destiny the middle finger, and is never seen again. That her words are allowed to be on the page is God's witness, taking a note from Robert

Alter, "that no triumph is simple or unambiguous (229)," not even the ones God designs.

Some back story. Saul was the first king over Israel. But, it is said in our scripture, there came a day when God grew tired of Saul's ways. Not knowing what God would do, Saul often acted as one would if the world was always dark, never quite trusting God would be there for him. In time, God receded into the distance and Saul became more and more crazed. But when David, the one God had blessed, would come and play the harp, Saul would be at peace.

Saul had two daughters. Merab was the eldest, but in a narrative where the first one never "wins," the lot falls to Michal.

Her name first appears when we are told "Michal the daughter of Saul loved David, and they told Saul, and the thing was pleasing in his eyes. And Saul thought, "I shall give her to him, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." (1 Samuel 18: 20 – 21)

Saul sets the bride price. If David wants to marry Michal, David needs to bring to King Saul a hundred of their enemy's--the Philistines'--foreskins. Well David, who never loses a battle, brings two hundred, and Saul gives his daughter, Michal, to be David's wife. Celebrate good times?!

"And Saul saw and marked that the LORD was with David, and Michal the daughter of Saul loved him. And Saul was all the more afraid of David, and Saul became David's constant enemy." (1 Samuel 28- 29)

Michal's love was used to send David into what was supposed to be his death. Michal's love made her father even more afraid.

This young maiden gives her heart in love, seeks only to be loved by Dad and husband, and her father turns her into a type of chess piece he moves around in order to topple a king. When David returns, her Dad does not celebrate with his daughter, but turns her beloved into his constant enemy. Oh, what a damper that puts on family meals.

Where's her friend? Where's her rabbi? Where's her Mom? Where's her God?

No time to explore these things, at least not now. We have to go on to the battle between the men. How often things get swept under the rug so we can move on to the more important things. Too bad for us that the human heart isn't like a rug...it can't remain still when stepped on.

"And there was still more fighting, and David sallied forth

and did battle with the Philistines and struck a great blow against them, and they fled before him. And an evil spirit of the LORD came upon Saul as he was sitting in his house, his spear in his hand and David playing."

An evil spirit of the LORD came upon Saul...what? Just who is moving these chess pieces? Saul begs us to give answer. But we must move on.

"And Saul sought to strike the spear through David into the wall, but he slipped away from Saul, and Saul struck the spear into the wall. Then David fled and escaped on that night. And Saul sent messengers to David's house to keep watch over him and to put him to death in the morning."

He would have succeeded if it hadn't been for his meddling kid:

"And Michal [David's] wife told David, saying, "If you do not get yourself away tonight, tomorrow you'll be dead." And Michal let David down from the window, and he went off and fled and got away. And Michal took the household gods and put them in the bed, and the twist of goat's hair she put at its head, and covered them with a cloth. And Saul sent messengers to take David, and she said, "He is ill." And Saul sent messengers to see David, saying, "Bring him up to me in the bed, that he may be put to death." And the messengers came, and look, the household gods were in the bed and the twist of the goat's hair at its head! And Saul said to Michal, "Why have you thus deceived me, and let my enemy go and he got away? And Michal said to Saul, "He said to me: 'Let me go. Why should I kill you?'"

Oh, how well she plays her part.

A poem by Anna Akhmatova, Michal:

But David was loved...by the daughter of Saul, Michal. Saul thought: I will give her to him, and she will be a snare for him.

First Book of Kings  
[Slavonic Bible]

And the youth plays for the mad king,  
And annihilates the merciless night,  
And loudly summons triumphant dawn  
And smothers the specters of fright.  
And the king speaks kindly to him:  
"In you, young man, burns a marvelous flame,  
And for such a medicine  
I will give you my daughter and my kingdom."  
And the king's daughter stares at the singer,  
She needs neither songs nor the marriage crown;  
Her soul is full of grief and resentment,  
Nevertheless, Michal wants David.

She is paler than death; her mouth is compressed,  
 In her green eyes, frenzy;  
 Her garments gleam and with each motion  
 Her bracelets ring harmoniously.  
 Like a mystery, like a dream, like the first mother, Lilith....  
 She speaks without volition:  
 "Surely they have given me drink with poison  
 And my spirit is clouded.  
 My shamelessness! My humiliation!  
 A vagabond! A brigand! A shepherd!  
 Why do none of the king's courtiers,  
 Alas, resemble him?  
 But the sun's rays...and the stars at night...  
 And this cold trembling..."

1959-61

Translated from Russian

By Judith Hershchemeyer

There's one more scene we must call forth on behalf of Michal. It is a scene which provides a fleeting glimpse of an answer to the question, where is God? In order to provide us the vision, the narrative moves outside the politics of the palace. After David escapes from window, Saul chooses to give Michal to (another man). "Paltiel the son of Laish, who was from Gallim," becomes her husband (1 Samuel 25:44). Years pass; Saul dies; David wins yet another battle and David demands Michal be sent back to him. David's demand contains a reminder of the foreskins he once brought Saul, but no proclamation of love. Yet, he is king. So...

Ish-bosheth, in order to meet David's demand, took [Michal] from her husband, from Paltiel son of Laish.

As you hear the next words, remember, it is only a glimpse of God we will get. There won't be any justification of David's deeds or explanation of God's ways. Reading through the books of Samuel, the scene is easily missed, easily dismissed in the midst of so much blood spilled and in the injustice of Michal's life. Yet, how necessary are these few words to us who believe the Bible's truth that God followed Adam and Eve outside of the Garden of Eden.

Ish-bosheth sends Abner to bring Michal back to David's palace. She is taken from her husband and, as she is, we see, not her face, but the tears of Paltiel.

Scripture says, "...her husband went with her, weeping as he went after her, as far as Bahurim. And Abner said to him, "Go back!" And [Paltiel] went back." (2 Samuel 3: 15 -16)

Paltiel follows his wife as far as the force of politics will allow. He demonstrates his desire to hold on to her. The

force of the narrative is to say that this is no battle he can fight to win. David's political need is much too powerful. The palace will hold Michal hostage to its needs.

But Michal, seen from this scene outside of the palace, is more than the dutiful wife of a king, the childless woman, the locked up raging wife.

Paltiel refuses to wave goodbye to his beloved Michal from a window. Michal matters too much to him. He will shed tears she cannot cry. He will mourn what she cannot. He will step out after her, in the moment she is led away, in silent proclamation of his love for a beautiful woman named Michal.