

[For Your Sakes He Became Poor](#)

Scripture Lessons: 2nd Corinthians 8: 1-15 and 2nd Samuel 1: 1, and 17-27

Sermon title: For Your Sakes He Became Poor Preached on July 1, 2018

The Fourth of July is this week and so today, in preparation and anticipation of celebrating our nation's birthday, our hymns for worship, especially the last hymn, are a little more patriotic than normal, which makes sense. This church of ours not only makes its home in the United States of America, but Presbyterians were there when it all began. I'm sure you've heard it said that there were more Presbyterian signers of the Declaration of Independence than any other denomination. If you see any Baptists or Methodists this afternoon, be sure to remind them of that.

So this week I've been thinking about how more than 200 years ago Presbyterians were there declaring independence from England and her king – and how quickly and definitively the line between the mother country and her colony became a battle line. How the Declaration of Independence was like a Dear John letter to say, “We'll be getting along better without you.” How after the Boston Massacre, British soldiers were seen as enemies who could not be trusted. How the Boston Tea Party violently expressed the resentment of American consumers. How at that time British sympathizers were tarred and feathered by mobs made up of their neighbors. I think about all that, for today I see the same kind of rift that steadily grew between America and Briain spreading to divide America against herself.

On Friday June 22nd, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, press secretary, and defender of President Donald Trump, walked in to a little 26-seat restaurant called the Red Hen in Lexington, Virginia. The chef of the restaurant called the owner, Stephanie Wilkinson at her home, telling her “The staff is a little concerned. What should we do?” Ms. Wilkinson left her home, drove to her restaurant, met with her employees and said to them: “Tell me what you want me to do. I can ask her to leave,” and they said “yes.” Stephanie Wilkinson then politely asked the press secretary to leave, and the Press Secretary did. I would have to. After all, if the chef and waitstaff didn't want her there, who knows what they would have done to her food, but that's not the point, is it? The point is that on the eve of the Fourth of July, it's obvious that our nation cannot eat at the same dinner table. That's a big deal. And while I suppose we've always been divided or dividing, there's always been a difference between Republicans and Democrats, it seems to me that this is a newly challenging and confusing time.

As Christians, in times of challenge and confusion, if we are wise and faithful, for guidance we turn not to Twitter, Facebook, not to whatever we consider to be the real or fake news, but to Scripture where there is always guidance and hope. In this time of division, when compromise seems impossible and party loyalty seems paramount, this morning we turn to the transition of power from one king to another in Ancient Israel to see how God's chosen conducted himself in a time of conflict.

Today we turn to David, who was chosen by God and anointed by the Prophet Samuel long before he had the chance to sit on the throne and rule. He had been waiting and waiting, only now he is finally poised to sit as King of Israel for King Saul is dead. Effectively, this is exactly what David wanted. This is what any of those who were close to Saul and knew his paranoia first

hand were waiting for too – the nation was ready for a new king, and possibly David was readier than anyone. But as David hears about Saul’s death, will he celebrate? Will he pontificate? Will he boast in his own superiority over the leader he is to replace? Will he play up Saul’s weakness or highlight his mistakes? Will he add fuel to resentment, make a monster out of the former king and tell Israel that now that he wears the crown, everything is going to be perfect? No. The messenger who delivered the news of Saul and his son Jonatan’s death is killed and not rewarded, and rather than dance on the grave of the dead King Saul, Scripture tells us that “David intoned this lamentation”: Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places! How the mighty have fallen! Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! They were swifter than eagles, They were stronger than lions. O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle!

It’s hard to imagine some politicians doing something like that today. Maybe you remember the presidential debates a couple years ago. Someone asked the candidates, Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton, to say something nice about the other. A man named Carl Becker stood up and said, “My question to both of you is, regardless of the current rhetoric, would either of you name one positive thing that you respect in one another?” It was the one of the most awkward moments I’ve ever seen on television. Today I’d love to hear President Trump sing a song about the former president the way David sang about the former king, so I wrote a couple verses. Imagine President Trump singing this: He could beat me in basketball. He has a great head of hair. The way I’ve criticized him, hasn’t always been fair. It’s hard to imagine something like that happening.

On the other hand, as the Marietta Daily Journal covered the death of long-time football coach James “Friday” Richards, I read a quote from Scott Jones, who started the Kennesaw Mountain High School football program in 2000. He referred to Coach Friday as the “comrade of coaches” and said he acted, not only as a coach, but as father figure to everyone. Now he said that “although [Coach] Jones had only one win against Richards’ Marietta teams in all the time they played against each other.” Jones said Richards was always generous before and after their games — win or lose. “He was a competitive coach who wanted to win,” Jones said, “but in the grand scheme of things, he was not all about that.” It seems to me, that considering politics in the United States of America today, in the grand scheme of things we are exactly all about that. Politics today seems to be a zero-sum game, where the only thing that matters is winning, and whenever winning and the chosen method of pretending to lead is pointing fingers rather than looking for solutions we the people are in danger.

The great Hubert Humphrey, who served as Vice President under Lyndon Johnson, is quoted as saying: “To err is human. To blame someone else is politics.” That’s funny, but in this country today we are tearing at the seams. Friendships are ending, crowds are chanting, fingers are pointed. It has become commonplace for some to express their discontent, not in words, but in bullets and our leaders can’t seem to pull us together to do anything about it. Every news cycle it gets harder to imagine those on one side of the aisle sitting down for a meal with those on the other, and that’s bad, because sitting down for a meal together is one of those powerful events that enables us to see those who think or act differently as people. Let me tell you what I mean.

I once worked with a big group of men and women of questionable citizenship status. I was a lawn maintenance man, and as one of few among the group with a valid driver's license I was quickly promoted to crew leader. One morning, driving in to the shop I noticed that a rabbit ran out into the street and the car ahead of me hit it. A few minutes later, as I was loading the mowers and weed eaters into the truck, one of my crew mates, a man from central Mexico named Miguel, rode into the shop on his bicycle. One hand on the handlebars, the other, holding a dead rabbit by its hind legs. He skinned the rabbit. Cleaned it with a hose. Then he asked me to stop by his apartment on the way to our first job so he could put it in his refrigerator.

This was one of those jobs where they didn't want to pay us overtime, so when we had made 40 hours by Friday morning, they sent us home early and Miguel invited me over for lunch at his apartment. I was nervous, but I reluctantly accepted, and there we ate tacos; fortunately, they weren't rabbit tacos, but over the lunch table, I learned a lot. I learned that six of them lived in a one-bedroom apartment so that they'd have more money to send home to their wives and children. I learned that only one of them knew how to cook, because all the others had left wives and mothers back in Mexico without learning how. I learned that back home they were professionals (one was a dance instructor) but they all had come to Atlanta in the hopes of providing a better life for their loved ones.

That's what I hope for. I hope for such a table even more than I hope for a song – I hope for a table that our whole country can sit around and get to know each other again. A table where people overcome difference and see each other not according to label – not as legal or illegal – republican or democrat – but as a child of God. In this church there is a table. You remember who he ate with – tax collectors and sinners. Fishermen and Pharisees. He even calls on us to come and eat with him, despite our questionable status, despite our guilt. Having been invited by him despite our depravity, we must be bold to live up to such a gift of radical and undeserved graciousness. For your sakes he became poor – is what they said to the church in Corinth, “so who do you think you are keeping it all to yourself?” For our sakes he became human, so who do we think we are pretending that we're any better than anyone else. For our sakes he gave up his life – that's what this table is about – and you and I are invited, but if we receive this grace, we had better be prepared to pass it on to our neighbor who doesn't deserve it either. David was generous to Saul, though Saul was trying to kill him. And Christ is generous to us, so he invites us here. But we must be as gracious to our neighbors as Christ has been to us. Amen.