

**2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33. Context.** Absalom, son of David, after killing his half-brother Amnon for the brutal rape of his sister Tamar, and alienating himself from his father's affections, slowly gained the popularity of the people and then rose up in rebellion against David. Gathering an army, he marched on Jerusalem, while David fled across the Jordan. Entering the city, Absalom publicly raped the 10 concubines that David had left behind, and then pursued his father. As the battle approached, David admonished his three commanders not to kill his son. But in the end, Joab killed the captured and defenseless Absalom. David's own people are afraid to tell the king of Absalom's death, since David had a reputation for killing the messenger. The job falls to a foreigner, a Cushite. David is inconsolable. The judgment that had been pronounced by Nathan as punishment for David's rape of Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah has been fulfilled.

***The king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders concerning Absalom. So the army went out into the field against Israel; and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. The men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the slaughter there was great on that day, twenty thousand men. The battle spread over the face of all the country; and the forest claimed more victims that day than the sword. Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. His head caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on.... And ten young men, Joab's armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him, and killed him.... Then the Cushite came; and the Cushite said <to David>, "Good tidings for my lord the king! For the LORD has vindicated you this day, delivering you from the power of all who rose up against you." The king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" The Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up to do you harm, be like that young man." The king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"***

**Reflection.** Bruce Birch writes in the *New Interpreter's Bible* (2.1342) that "Absalom went to war against his father in an effort to seize for himself a place he had lost by imitating the violence his own father had used to get what he desired. This vicious cycle is not unknown to the parents and children of every generation. We know that we have modeled behavior and values that subsequent generations will imitate—to our sorrow. If we identify with the grief of David over his son, it is because we too often experience it as our own, or that of others close to us. This scene of David's desolation will forever touch the human heart with its portrait of a father's pain. One can hope that it will also remind us that time can run out. There are stories in which the prodigal son does not come home and the waiting father's embrace is empty." As Christians, how can we break this cycle, both for families we know and those we don't?

**Psalm 130. Context.** One of the "penitential" psalms, this psalm expresses the despair of our sinfulness, but proclaims that not even the depths of despair and sinfulness are beyond God's love and redemption. A word to David – and to those who have known both his sin and his grief.

***Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered. I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning. O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.***

**Reflection.** God knows that we will stumble and fall, that we will suffer the consequences of our sins. Yet God will not abandon us if we repent. Can you believe that no matter how terribly you sin, no matter how far you wander from God, God will welcome you back if you want to come back?

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**Ephesians 4:25-5:2. Context.** In this week's reading, the author continues the theme of the nature of our relationships with one another in the body of Christ. Continuing his notion of "speaking the truth in love," he focuses on what we say to one another and how we say it as an essential mark of Christian community. He ends by exhorting his readers to imitate God by loving and forgiving one another.

***So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.***

**Reflection.** Implicit in the author's exhortations is the notion that living the Christian life is not something that we can go off and do on our own, but requires the loving support of others striving for the same end, that living the Christian life is a "team activity." How would you translate some of the lessons learned playing on various teams into rules for Christian living?

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**John 6:35, 41-51. Context.** This week's reading continues Jesus' discussion with the crowd about the real meaning of his having fed the 5000. Jesus has already told them that the true food, that which leads to the fullness of life, is not material, but spiritual, and that he embodies that food. He tells them that it is God's will that all who come to him and believe in him will receive eternal life. The crowd is still not prepared to accept Jesus' teaching; after all, they think they know his family, as though his human family was all that mattered. At this point the evangelist symbolically uses the term "Jews" to describe those who do not accept what Jesus is saying (since after all, even Jesus and his disciples were Jews). After emphasizing his unique relationship to God, Jesus reminds the crowd that their ancestors who ate the manna in the wilderness, "the bread from heaven," died because they grumbled against God, suggesting that the crowd would suffer the same fate if they chose not to believe in Jesus, the true bread from heaven. Jesus ends this part of the discourse with a veiled reference to his death on the cross.

***Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.... Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."***

**Reflection.** In these verses, Jesus expands on the point he made earlier, that trusting in him and in God is what sustains us in our lives. God offers Jesus to everyone, but not everyone is ready to take the offer. We don't have to follow Jesus if we don't want to. But if we do choose to follow Jesus, meditating on his words and obeying his commandment to love one another that he gave to his disciples at their last supper together before his death on the cross, we will find a spiritual fulfillment that will satisfy our deepest spiritual needs.