From the Warwick Central Baptist Church pulpit  
October 13, 2019  
"Wanting the Impossible" (II Samuel 23:13-17)  
Dr. Dan Ivins, praching

The Text Says:

Our Old Testament scripture lesson offers a glimpse of one of the most colorful characters in the Bible, King David. We marvel at his exploits as protective shepherd, giant killer, friend of Jonathan, husband of Bathsheba, father of Solomon and Israel's greatest king. Today we reflect over his genuine longing: **AO that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem, that is by the gate!** David is in mid-life, with a desire to go back to **Ayesterday.** The story shows why David was **Aa man after God=s own heart,** as well as his comrades. He knew how to appreciate the good things that came to him, their cost to others, and how they were meant to be used in his life.

The preacher Says:

Our text shows the softer side of David. This is not the famous king-military warrior-giant-killer-womanizer David. This David is homesick; something familiar to all of us -- wishing for something that seemed impossible. After Saul fell on his sword in battle, David was next-in-line; the new king on the block. And along with it -- the responsibility that goes with the territory of being a leader. When the present is too hard to face, David=s longing for yesterday, for the familiar. With our minds we know it=s impossible. With our hearts, we wish for it nevertheless.

David had mastered difficult challenges before, warding off wild animals with his bare hands and Goliath with a sling. Now he is a king! No longer a cocky lad. The boss, not a shepherd B carrying weighty decisions around on his shoulders. The Philistines sensed his vulnerability and that evening David surveyed the situation. It didn=t look good. Way outnumbered by the enemy, he gazed at the flickering fires of his foes in the darkness ... then it struck him! Beyond the entrenched enemy lines, there on the friendly hillside of his youth -- he could see the lights of Bethlehem glowing in the distance. The contrast got to him: Bethlehem on one side; David on the other; Philistines in-between.

David couldn=t help himself, wishing out loud: **AOh that somebody would get me a drink from Bethlehem=s gate...** What I=d give for a taste of that water! There=s no water like that! For a moment there, out under the starry canopy, he was a ruddy-faced kid again. Staring across the valley, David the king was **Alost in the 50's tonight.**

Wanting the impossible messes with your focus. Being preoccupied with yesterday, makes you oblivious to what=s happening today. Cause right under his nose, his bravest General=s ears, were tuned to his heart. A3 mighty men broke through the Philistines= camp and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem=s gate, and brought it to David. Whew! Now that=s what I call loyalty! The next thing David knew, he=s standing there with a goatskin of that very water in his hands!

The king was deeply touched by their courage. Cause it came at great peril to the lives of soldiers he valued. He was stunned at the dedication of his men who retrieved this priceless gift. So he graciously accepted the water. **Then poured it out on the ground as a sacrifice to God!** That=s David at his best! So the soldiers startled David by their allegiance to him. And they were equally jolted by his fidelity to God!

Did you notice the subtle change in terminology? **A>Far be it from me, Lord, that I should do this. It=s the blood of these men who risked their lives. So he would not drink it.** The softer side of David. Funny things happen to water in the Bible. Moses struck a rock in the wilderness and out came water. At a wedding in Cana, Jesus changed water into wine, cause wine=ll make you happy! And here, David turns water into blood, cause blood is thicker than water.
Several things stand out to me in this story. First is David's longing to go back to a simpler time. Kinging and warring can get to you. It's not just the water but what it stood for. A deep, inner yearning. "Oh what I'd give for a taste of that water by the gate in Bethlehem." Those easy days of his youth. They stand in marked contrast to the dutiful life of being a king. His conquests didn't just end with Goliath the giant. With David the giants keep coming! The chaos, the pressure to do what it takes to win, watching your friends die; no let up from the stress. So David wants to go back home, like it used to be.

I'm sure many of you have shared David's longing. Just a peek over the horizon and he wanted the impossible. It's understandable ... for anybody who's made mistakes. Nobody lives completely without some regrets. Even great ones like David.

Who wouldn't like to do some things over again, knowing what you know now? Maybe his desire for retreat was to undo something he was ashamed of. This time I bet he'd treat Bathsheba differently. And Uriah! And his son Absalom. To go back to Bethlehem, to have a 2nd chance. "O for a drink of that water by the well at Bethlehem's gate!" To turn back the hands of time and be in our prime! Man! Think of the wrongs we might correct. Next time we'll get it right!

Or it could be a longing for the days when it seemed like you had all the time in the world. You took your health for granted; you could drive at night; and do fun stuff. The heady days when David won big victories, even tho he was the underdog. When his assignment was a flock of sheep to watch, not the complexity managing a nation. ATThe lights of Bethlehem@ brought back memories of those days.

You know the song: ATThose were the days, my friend, we thought they'd never end; we'd sing and dance forever and a day. We ran with whom we choose, we'd fight and never lose. Those were the days.@ David coveted the time before he was king; when he was just a shepherd. No controversial decisions to make. When everything you do is criticized. No land mines that blow up in your face. Kinging is different from shepherding. Having power creates complications, and far-reaching consequences; unending strain. And the adversaries -- ah those Philistines -- they're always there.

I'm guessing most of us here understand David's experience. Wistful moments come upon us too. Who doesn't crave a former existence? "Just a drink of that Bethlehem water, by the gate!" That would really hit the spot! But the odds were against it. Just wishful thinking. The idea is one thing; the reality eventually sets in on our fantasizing. The way was obstructed. Something formidable stood between him and his hometown. Enemy troops denied access to the well of his desire. Anybody who's been stymied from something you want or someone you love or a place you used to be, can empathize with David. As we reflect back on the Bethlehem days of OUR lives, who wouldn't want to recapture something of the life we once knew?

For David the Philistines forbid passage. What stands between us and our yearnings? Fear of the unknown? The inevitable toll of aging? Vision wanes, steps wobble, friends die, time accelerates, space shrinks. There's an unnerving relentlessness about it. Eventually, we're all driven more and more into ourselves. Living guarantees it. Somebody said Aaging= is like a roll of toilet paper; the more you use it, the faster it goes! "If I could get to that water!" Some things are impossible, you can only be sad about em.

Maybe David couldn't go back. But his seasoned veterans sure could! While David dreamed, 3 brave men dared! Disregarding the danger to themselves, they fearlessly broke through the enemy camp, drew out the water right under their noses, and brought it to the Commander in chief. This is the first surprise.

On the one hand is the gate barred by opposition, feeling sad, and helpless. But also the breakthrough to the well, with great courage, and devotion. We oughta be familiar with both impulses; the feeling that what we want is impossible. But also the determination that, even tho something= is difficult, it can be done if we put forth the effort.

David was blessed to have 3 strong men who believed in him. That's one thing we can do as fellow church members -- believe in each other. That's the best gift any church can offer its members. You hear a lot about believing in God around churches. Properly so. But don't we also need to believe in each another?
You haven’t lived long enough, if you’ve never wanted to go back to an easier time. Yeah we know it’s impossible. But it doesn’t stop us from wishing for it. But David’s generals, laid it on the line: AYou heard the man! Why don’t we go fetch it for him?@ His desire to go back didn’t stop them from going forward! They risked their lives for their leader, because of his craving for something that seemed insurmountable. This is the deepest kind of allegiance, that’s willing to sacrifice your life without blinking.

The King was so overcome by their devotion. AFar be it from me, Lord, that I should drink this water. Shall I drink the blood of the men who risked their lives? Therefore, he wouldn’t drink it.@ The other surprise! Can you believe it? David wanting the impossible. But when he got it, he wouldn’t accept it!

Once the gift of water/blood was in his hands, and the impossible had been realized, he didn’t just guzzle it down. David was a better man than that. Nah, for him, the blood/water was far too sacred to drink. I can see why he was Aa man after God’s own heart,@ and had the respect of his men! He had a genuine appreciation for what he was given that came at great risk from others. And his refusal to drink it, was matched only by his resolve to offer it back to God!

So! The impossible=s not as impossible as it seems! The message of the church is, you can be a child again--a child of God! From the Gospel of John, Chapter 1: "For as many as received him, he gave them the power to become ... children of God." Bet your life on that, and the impossible can become possible in your life!

Prayer: Sometimes Lord, we get mighty thirsty, longing for yesterday. And our desires play havoc with us. We would like to do a lot of things, but think we can’t. We find lots of excuses. Teach us how to make our desires reasonable and worthy. We pray for those who no longer have anything to look forward to. For those who put spiritual growth at the bottom of their priorities; as well as those whose desires put self at the center--those who would drink the water with no thought of what it cost to get it, those who would run roughshod over others in pursuit of their desires. And we pray for all who are hurting because what they long for most -- they cannot have. Dear God, may we learn from this biblical story to want what you want, to become who you want, and to do as you want. Teach us as a church to believe in people who need believing in so that all of us can quit saying "I can’t," and to learn how to say, "We must." Amen.