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There is a Right Way and a Wrong Way. [L] [SEP]

1 Samuel 17:57–18:5, 10-16

God does not act in a vacuum but in reality, in history and even right now. We discover the will of God and its unrelenting power dramatically displayed in the lives of people. Today, the main players are King Saul and David. The boy David has just slain the giant, Goliath. Standing before king Saul, he is acclaimed a conquering hero, and presented a place of honor in the king's court.

This decision by the king is the beginning of the end for the Saul. David becomes a friend of the king's son Jonathon. Jonathon comes to love David to a degree that he establishes a covenant with him. King Saul is utterly captivated with the success and leadership skills of David, that he promotes him to a high rank in the army, and everyone is delighted.

Once again, this kingly decision adds to Saul's psychological, spiritual, and physical end. The king begins to have doubts about David as he becomes jealous of him. Anxiety and apprehension erode the soul of Saul. Please note verse 10 of chapter 18 again: *"The very next day, in fact, a tormenting spirit from God overwhelmed Saul, who was fiddling with his spear, and he suddenly hurls it at David."*

Here we see Saul obsessing over David; but the king was in trouble long before David killed the Giant. Saul's army was shaking in fear at the edge of the battlefield, ridiculed by Goliath. Saul was in such a sorry spiritual state, that when he sees God's favor resting in David, he seeks to ride to victory on the shirrtails of a child.

With this action, the king begins his slow decline into nightmare and obscurity. In this story is the suggestion that Saul's emotional weakness and lack of faith, opened the door to evil spirits. Without faith, jealousy, anxiety and fear, bloom. It is a situation we humans are all too familiar with.

Today's Old Testament Lesson could be an HBO series, as contemporary viewers are enamored with 'reality' shows. One of the difficulties with 'reality' is that it reveals our hungers and our needs. King Saul's downfall is a reminder that humanity is vulnerable to the monsters of our own making.

The origin of King Saul's collapse is his unwillingness to know and follow God's will for his life. The pattern is shifting for him and he frankly does not get it. The next king of Israel will be David. The old is eventually replaced by the new. Change happens, it is around the corner for all of us. It is what it is.

Stanley Cavell, writing of Shakespeare's play King Lear, says "... *we would rather murder the world than permit it to expose us to change. We would rather destroy everything than let other people change us, so strong is our memory of how changed we were at the very beginning of our lives by certain people; people who could change our misery into bliss, as if by magic, and which we were unable to do ourselves. . . .*"

Change in the Body of Christ is both an awareness of the sacred, and solid action arising from that awareness.

This story is heartbreaking because king Saul cannot, or will not, agree with God's will in his life, or in the life of God's people he is called to serve. It appears that Saul has misplaced the nature of what it means to be king: serving God's people in keeping with God's will. Saul's resistance results in inevitable change. Ultimately, the cost is everything he loves, including his life.

Saul failed because there were severe deficiencies in his character:
God doesn't need brains-He wants character.
God doesn't need brawn (huge strong muscles)-He wants integrity.
God doesn't need anyone's wisdom, power, or wealth-He wants obedience.
God doesn't need ambitious confidence-He wants humble dependence.

How ironic that this Old Testament passage is read during the Season of Pentecost. This season emphasizes the unpredictable work and movement of the Holy Spirit in the Body of Christ, the church, and in the world. The purpose of the

church universal is to follow the Spirit wherever she leads regardless of the cost.

The Holy Spirit is the instrument of God's will in the world, and the church is charged to avail herself to the movement and work of the Spirit. Any hesitation or stubbornness in obedience will certainly lead to loss. God's church is *at her best* when she gives herself unselfishly to the will of God. She is *at her worst* when she denies such will and is instead, led by fear, jealousy, anxiety, or selfishness.

For "Followers of the Way," we must go beyond king Saul's external and superficial relationship with God. We need to discover an inner bond with God through Jesus Christ. Rather than merely 'following' Jesus, or 'believing in him', we must become him for other people.

King Saul becomes lost because he forgets what is the first priority for all of us: *following God all of the time*. May be be so for us. Alleluia. Amen.