

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota
November 1, 2015

1 Kings 12: 1-17
Mark 10: 42-45
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Kids, **Jim Warneke** got sick Friday morning at Men's Breakfast. His heart did something goofy and he got a bad pain in his shoulders and he started to faint. **Tom Plagman** was there and he is a **First Responder**. He has learned how to help people when there is an emergency. So Tom started talking to Jim and got him sat down on a chair.

Once Tom decided that Jim needed to go to the hospital, one guy **called 911** for an ambulance to come. Another guy went and **waited by the door** to show the ambulance people where Jim was. Some other guys **carried Jim out** of the kitchen so that he could lie down. Others **prayed** quietly.

The next thing you know, in came the **police chief**, then three **Emergency Medical Technicians**. Very soon, the ambulance arrived with two more medical people. They loaded Jim onto a fancy stretcher and into the ambulance and away they went to the hospital. Then all of us guys stopped and prayed for Jim together. Then people decided who was going to bring Jim's coat and cap to the hospital and his car home for him.

Once at the hospital, all kinds of other people started working to help Jim. Then the Prayer Chain got started at the church and soon all kinds of other people were praying for Jim. And God was helping Jim through all of it and through all of us.

Let's pretend that you are sick, Johnny, and that we want to help you. I have a stretcher here to carry you on. Lay on the stretcher and I will carry you. Oh, wait. I can only hold one side and when I pick up, you roll off. We need lots of people holding onto the stretcher to carry you to get help right? Right! That's how God helps us. God uses lots of people to help.

Jim got some new medicine and is doing much better now. I asked him if I could tell his story to you this morning. He said, "**Absolutely! And you can tell them that I had so many people praying for me and helping me that I am going to be able to go home again soon.**" God made us to be able to **help each other**. **Thanks for helping** to do that here. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

Israel's third king, **Solomon**, built Israel's army, temple, palace and other public works to that nation's highest level of achievement. These were the glory days for the Jewish empire. But King Solomon, in his God-given success, had gradually slipped from serving God and God's people to building up his own power, glory and wealth. And Solomon's accomplishments had required that a heavy burden be placed upon the shoulders of the citizens of Israel. High taxes and physical labor had worn them down. Their backs were breaking by the time that Solomon died. Now it was time for Solomon's son, **Rehoboam**, to take the throne. To lead the people. But Rehoboam didn't think much about God or God's people either.

The people of Israel gathered to make **Rehoboam** king. But first they said to their soon-to-be king, **"Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke that he placed on us and we will serve you."**

Rehoboam asked for time to consider their request to lighten the burdens Solomon had placed upon them. Rehoboam then wisely sought out the **elders** who had been counselors to his father Solomon. They would have been the ones who had learned from the school of hard knocks when to:

- Listen/ Pray/ Keep silent/ Speak up/ Bring a word of judgment/ Bring a hopeful, life-giving word/ Discern what won't matter in five years/ Determine what has true and lasting value, rather than temporary gratification. They would know what was best for God's people.

The elders told him, **"If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever."** He went on to ask his **young peers** what they thought. They told him to say, **"My little finger is thicker than my father's loins. Now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions."** The elders recommended that Rehoboam practice compassion and caring for his people. The young bucks recommended that he push them even harder than his father had. **Rehoboam slipped up.** Rehoboam decided to **push them harder.**

You heard our lesson, when Rehoboam spoke those threatening words to his people; the **kingdom of Israel broke apart**. The ten northern tribes of Israel **packed up their tents and went home**. They didn't need Rehoboam to be their king.

Israel's king was supposed to be a **servant king**. The people were supposed to be **servant people**. The king's job was to love and care for the people as God's representative on earth. The king was supposed to lead the people in loving and following God. King Rehoboam didn't understand that and the **kingdom of Israel, God's chosen ambassadors** to the world, **broke apart and eventually disintegrated**.

God had richly blessed the descendants of Abraham, God's people, so that they could be a blessing to everyone else in the world. Rehoboam could have listened to the elder advisors as they recommended **compassion and partnership**. He **could have regained the love, respect and faithful service of his people**. If he would have cared about his people, they would have cared about him. That was the counsel of the elders. He didn't listen. He selfishly went with the counsel to **get more glory, power and honor for himself** rather than to **care for his people**.

Jesus, 900 years after the time of Rehoboam, told the people of tiny, beaten up, occupied Israel that God had a different kind of king in mind. In **Mark 10: 42-45**, we hear Jesus say, **"You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."** **Would such a ruler ever get elected president** of this country? **Governor** of our state? **Mayor** of our community? **Who rules in your life, the selfish king or the servant king?**

How does authority work in your household? Do good parents give their kids what the kids **want right now**, or do good parents give their kids what they **need for a lifetime**, maybe even for an **eternity**? Are you preparing your kids for **deep, rich and abundant life** in this tough world? Or are you just **trying to keep them happy**? Are you preparing your kids to be **citizens of an eternity** spent with a **loving, caring and faithful God**?

What kind of people does God want us to be, today, here in Aitkin? Is it enough for us to just be **shocked and angry** that a person from our community had **enough anger and hate to abuse his wife** for years? **So little self-worth** as to **try to take his own life**? And **so little value for life** as to shoot and **kill a law enforcement officer**, beloved husband, father and church and community member? **Is our shock and anger enough**? Or will we **rise up and devote ourselves to rescuing kids** from a **selfish, hurting world and destructive life styles**?

One of the shooter's classmates told me that this man was **not the bully in elementary school, but was the bullied**. As he grew, he became the bully. So when wicked things like our recent shooting take place, do we **just accept it**? Do we just lie down and die? Or, do we **move our tents to a new place/way of doing things and start over again**? When King Rehoboam didn't care about his people, they decided to try to find a better way on their own. They picked up their tents and headed in a new direction. **Who rules in your life**, the **selfish king** or the **servant king**?

I attended the fall concert for the **Rippleside 4th-6th Grade Choirs and Band**. Once again I watched as the precious kids of this community sang and played their hearts out for teachers and parents. I looked to see which kids are from our faith family. I highlighted the names of over thirty kids in my program. We also have a ton of Rippleside teachers and other school staff who are members here at First.

Have you been to such a concert here in Aitkin or elsewhere? **You can see it in their eyes**. Some of the kids have such a **sad look** about them, like they are carrying the **weight of the world** on their shoulders. Many look like they **could use a hug**, somebody to **recognize and celebrate them**.

During the concert, **Ms. Jennifer Johnson**, their director, had the kids sing a song called, "**Fight Song**" by **Rachel Platten**. Some of the lyrics were:

This is my fight song/ take back my life song
 Like a small boat on the ocean/ sending big waves in motion
 Like how a single word/ can make a heart open
 I may have only one match/ but I can make a big explosion
 I'll be strong and I don't really care if nobody else believes/ 'cause
 I've still got a lot of fight left in me.

A lot of kids are in a fight for life. So, how do we rescue kids before they give up on life? How do we join them in the **fight not only to survive, but to thrive?** How do we help kids to **realize how precious they are to God?** How do we let kids know that **somebody does care** about them? Show them **how much they have to contribute** to our world? I am sure that the teachers, aides, cooks, custodians, bus drivers – all give over and above to **teach, love and care for these kids.** And I hope and pray that our kids **treat each other and every other kid respectfully.** And I hope and pray that our kids even **go out of their way to help** and encourage the kids who are **looking in from the outside,** not dressed just right, not very clean, not good students, have a tough home life...

And how can First Lutheran help to rescue kids? Nursery. Sunday school. Vacation Bible school. Community Meal. Soup Kitchen. Food Shelf. Wednesday night drop-in center. Confirmation classes. Youth activities. Milestone events. Foster Grandparent program at Rippleside. Faith chests. Going to school events. Camperships. Inviting. Bringing. Encouraging. The **Servant King is at work** in all of these ways. And the Servant King **invites us to serve with him.** In **what specific mission** has the **Servant King invited you to give yourself away?** Some people think that our Confirmation Banquet and Passover Seder Meal are too much work. How much work are the lives, hopes and dreams of our kids worth?

Is Christianity just about **“me and Jesus?”** Or is it about **God for us and us for God’s people and God’s world.** God’s Work. Our Hands. Is our question here at First Lutheran, **“Who do we let into this building?”** Or is our question, **“How many can we get into this building?”**

God loves and wants to save every child. If the kings won’t do it, the people of God have to do it. That’s the business we are in here at First Lutheran Church in Aitkin, Minnesota. We are a **first aid station,** a **clinic** for **any and all** who need it. God has blessed us to be a blessing to those who need us. **God and God’s precious children have been let down again and again by selfish kings and selfish people. Today it is our turn to follow the Servant King.** God help us to save every kid, every person that we can, one kid at a time. Thanks be to God. Amen.