**Jonathan**

**Bible Passages:** 1 Samuel 18: 1 – 9 & 1 Samuel 20: 1-42

Jonathan is a character that is easily overlooked, sandwiched as he is between King Saul and David, who of course later becomes King of Israel. I encourage you to have a good look at Jonathan though. He appears and disappears throughout chapters 13 – 31 of 1 Samuel. Though he is most present in chapters 14, 18, 19 and 20.

**A brief summary:**

Jonathan is one of Saul’s three sons and within his father’s army, builds himself a good military reputation. With God’s help he and his armour bearer rout the Philistines (ch 14), only to nearly die because Saul curses any soldier who will eat that day when Jonathan isn’t there. Jonathan is saved thanks to the ransom of the people who know it is Jonathan that has won them this victory.

He is then not mentioned for several chapters but one would assume that he would continue to be a part of Saul’s army throughout the many wars that Saul declares. We’re told in 14:47 that Saul fought wars against Moab, the Amonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah and the philistines. It is not impossible to think that Jonathan would have been a part of Saul’s fight against the Amelekites, whom God commanded utterly destroyed through the prophet Samuel, a battle that ultimately leads to his father’s rejection as king and the anointing of another.

David (the secretly anointed new king of Israel) enters king Saul’s employ to deal with the evil spirit that has entered him since he was rejected as king by Samuel. In my opinion at least, it is likely that Jonathan and David would have met, or at least crossed paths whilst David was playing the Lyre to soothe Saul. However, it is not until David defeats Goliath and has finished speaking to Saul that our first passage tells us “the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”

**First Questions:** The language of binding souls seems quite strong and is fairly evocative – some suggest that it deliberately mirrors the language of “one flesh” used with regard to marriage. David and Jonathan (and all the Israelites) have just emerged from a situation where their lives were literally on the line and now, they are bound together. Have you ever been through a particular situation with someone that has ‘bound you to them, and they to you’ in such a way? Why do you think it is Jonathan and David that form this particular bond? And not say Saul and David?

As our reading progresses Saul’s feelings toward David change dramatically. In chapter 19 Jonathan pleads with his father Saul for the life of David, and Saul promises not to put Jonathan’s dear friend to death. Only in chapter 20 Saul’s feelings have grown yet more fierce and Jonathan finds himself in a difficult situation. You will have read that Saul even throws a spear at his own son at his own feast and Jonathan rushes to tell David to flee.

**Second Questions:** We often hear it said that blood is thicker than water, or family first, but in the story of Jonathan and David we hear of a man choosing someone else over his family, a man who acknowledges the way his family is going and deliberately decides to take a stand and say this is not happening. What do you think led him to make that decision? What would it take for you to deliberately go a different way to those you loved? How do you hold Jonathans decision with the commandment to honour your father and mother?

**A lesson from Jonathan for today:**

No matter what happened Jonathan followed his heart. In his heart he was able to discern the best way to proceed. I am reminded of Paul’s prayer in his letter to the church of Philippi: “And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.” (Phillipians 1:9-11) In our covenant prayer, which as Methodists we say every year we always invite God to put us to what he will, to doing or suffering and it seems to me that Jonathans decisions were not necessarily easy, but without them David would not have been King and we would not have received the Davidic covenant and all that it entails.