

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33ⁱⁱ

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, "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!"

ⁱⁱ About 2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33

Today's reading describes the results foreshadowed by the prophet Nathan's words to David after his murder of Uriah and marriage to Bathsheba. Strife, indeed, plagued his household and his son Absalom participated in a bloody uprising against him.

Despite David's orders to "deal gently" with Absalom and thus lessen the expected harsh consequences of a son who would take up arms against a father, Absalom dies anyway as the

result of a freak accident in which he was caught up by the hair in the branches of a tree, and thus easily killed.

Again we are reminded that our actions bring about consequences that we often cannot imagine and certainly do not want. As Martin Luther King, Jr., reminded us, the long arc of God's providence bends inexorably toward justice.