

**October 23, 2022: THIS DAY'S SERMON – David and Bathsheba**

Readings: 2 Samuel 11:1-5, 26-27; Psalms 51:1-9

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Let us pray: *God of love and compassion, you have created and called us as your own and led us where we are. Empower us to serve you with compassion, loving and caring for those who are powerless. Confront us when we fall short, and restore us to try again, for your sake, and the sake of the world. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.*

Our reading from 2 Samuel this morning is one of the greatest scriptural depictions of the brokenness of humanity and what our loving God can do...in spite of us. In fact, it's difficult to find one thing right when reading a story which continues to live out even today. This is the story of a man entrusted – by God and God's people – with power; a power he abused at the highest levels.

Tim asked the question in addressing King David's actions in his At-Home Reflection: These were great times. What could go wrong?

What could go wrong, indeed...with a king – this king. A king beloved by God and the people; a man after God's own heart. Our reading sets the stage right out of the gate: "In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle..." When kings go out to battle. But where was this king? It seems he was safely ensconced at home, lounging mid-day on his couch. **Strike one.**

As the story is told, he gets up to walk about on the roof; and it's then that he sees her: A very beautiful woman bathing. While much has wrongly been made in some circles of Bathsheba's (yes, the beautiful woman does have a name) role in this sordid affair, what she was doing was an innocent act. In fact, it was more than innocent. It was something she was required to engage in by her Judaic tradition.

The parenthetical words – "*Now she as purifying herself after her period*" – were placed there intentionally. As private and, even, distasteful as they might seem to hear on a Sunday morning in worship, those words are necessary for us to hear in order for us to understand the depravity of King David's mind on this day.

You see, Bathsheba was in the mikvah, the bath used in the Judaic tradition for ritual cleansing and purification. To be in the mikvah on this day, she had to be at least seven days out from the end of her period.

As a man with numerous wives, as well as a man who followed Judaism and worshiped the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, David would have known what Bathsheba was doing there in that bath. As a thinking man, David should have known that this would have been a fertile time for this

beautiful woman.

Unfortunately, it appears that the King wasn't much in the mood for thinking that day. He sends a servant to inquire about the woman and soon learns who she is. This woman has a name. She is someone's daughter. She is someone's wife. Not even this knowledge can bring David to his senses. He has the woman brought to him. **Strike two.**

With all we know, it comes as no surprise, of course, the innocent victim of David's lustful gaze becomes pregnant and has no recourse but to turn to her abuser for help.

Remember, Bathsheba's husband, Uriah the Hittite, is out fighting the king's battles. The timing for a pregnancy is off and the thoughtless king has left a pretty obvious trail of people who know what he's done.

While the narrative reading for this morning leaves David's response to Bathsheba's "unexpected" pregnancy out, Tim filled them in for us in his reflection by reminding us that David then called Uriah back from battle, with the hope of getting him to sleep with his wife.

Had Uriah not been a faithful soldier, David's wrongful actions could have gone without notice. But Uriah was, in fact, faithful and disciplined. Refusing to take advantage of this unexpected furlough to spend time with his beautiful wife, Uriah makes the decision to sleep outside.

Finding himself cornered, David does the only thing he thinks he can do: He makes a plan to have Uriah sent to the front lines of battle where he's certain to be killed. And, of course, he is. **Strike three.**

While David has left a steady trail of breadcrumbs – as well as a trail of unintended but not unexpected consequences of brokenness – by virtue of his sordid abuse of power, he appears to go unscathed. His servants are trustworthy and loyal.

As one who, to the outside world, appears to be an honorable king, David does the right thing. He summons Bathsheba, a woman whose husband has been killed in the king's battle, to be his wife. That is, of course, after waiting for her time of mourning to pass.

Unfortunately for David, the God of All knows this and cannot let this servant's actions go unnoticed. A trail of debris – the collateral damage that comes as "unintended yet expected" consequences – ensues. For his victim, Bathsheba, this includes the loss of yet another innocent victim, her

infant child.

This is a hard story, isn't it? Because this is the God we don't want to hear about. This is the God we don't want to know or experience. And, yet, this is a God we need because this is a God who defends the powerless, even when we're unwilling to.

So God sends another servant – someone David knows and trusts – to speak truth to power. It seems that the greatest sin God wants repented is that of David's unwillingness or inability to dwell fully in the depth of what he has done.

He's committed adultery and murder. He's lied and he's cheated. He's caused innocent people held victim by his power to stumble by requiring them to participate in his schemes ... and, perhaps worst of all, he's forgotten that everything he has comes to him by God's own hand.

Like last week's scripture of Jesus at the mountaintop with Satan, we're reminded that everything belongs to God and is entrusted into our care in order to enrich our lives.

The danger of this story is that it's so easy for us to hear David's abuse of power and to immediately point to the headlines of today: Another trial for the Harvey Wiensteins and Kevin Spaceys of the world ... but is that really all we can take from this teaching? To look at it and feel smug in the fact that we haven't committed those particular sins?

I think there's something more. Pastor Phil reminded me of that on Wednesday morning when I was in the midst of this text, fuming, outraged, as the injustice of David's actions to all of his innocent victims.

He did that by asking me to stop for a minute and watch a video. I took a deep breath and sat down to watch a video of ... dolphins. Yes, that's what I said: Dolphins.

The story was about a woman who studies dolphins who placed a one-way mirror in their tank and recorded how they responded. It was amazing to watch. The dolphins immediately noticed the mirror and took turns gazing into it – at themselves – preening and gazing and flapping.

The thing is, the scientist said that their actions were completely unlike the actions they display when meeting other dolphins. It seems they knew they were looking at themselves and chose to take time to look more closely, opening their mouths, leaning back to get a better look at their bellies ... flapping their flippers in a way they'd never done within their community of fellow dolphins. They were taking time for self-examination.

Maybe that's what God wants us to take from this: To take time to truly think about our sin – to actually dwell in it deeply – before confessing it and asking for forgiveness – knowing and trusting and believing that this is a God who knows and forgives and redeems.

Like David, we often don't want to see ourselves in the story. We don't want God to see our broken moments either, yet God is present, reminding us to defend the powerless. If only we listen ... if only we hear ... if only we act.

Remember, this is the God who can start with our brokenness and create something new out of it. This is, after all, the God who brings Jesus into the world from this very crooked, broken line of David's lineage, not to condemn the world, but **to save it.**

*Amen.*