
The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost - Proper 12
Year B

Track 1
2 Samuel 11:1-15
Psalm 14
Ephesians 3:14-21
John 6:1-21

“It Happened, Late One Afternoon” / Knowing Full Well
2 Samuel 11:2

David and Bathsheba

Will you turn with me to the book of 2 Samuel, chapter 11.

Today as our Old Testament lesson we heard read the story of David and Bathsheba (one of the many stories in the Bible that makes me question the practice of giving Bibles to young children [said facetiously]). As you look at the beginning of chapter 11 let me set the stage and recap a little.

First of all, it would be good for you to recall that this David that we hear of today is King David, the second king of ancient Israel. This is the same David that killed Goliath with a slingshot in a one-on-one battle when David was probably in his early teen years. As David grew older he grew in popularity in the eyes of the Israelite people, so much so, that over a span of years David became more well-regarded by the people of Israel than their current and first king, King Saul. After Saul's tragic suicide on a battlefield David officially rose to the throne and was really the first king to solidly put the unified nation of Israel finally on the geopolitical map - all twelve tribes of Israel 'peacefully' unified under one king largely in the land that God had promised to Abraham centuries before.

With David came a measure of stability and growth that the nation of Israel has never before experienced. The fame of King David was solidly embraced by the Israelite people, and given today's lesson, also embraced, seemingly, by David himself.

Look at verse 1, “In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.” This verse tells us a lot about King David at that time. In short, it was springtime - flowers were blooming, birds were singing, and what better thing for kings to do but ... go to war. Essentially, during that time, if you wanted to maintain your borders and possibly even expand them then the best defense was a good offense - meaning you wanted your neighbors to never doubt your military strength lest they get a little cocky and want to try and conquer you and your land. So spring was when kings led their armies out to battle. But notice where David was. Leading the charge? No. Strategizing with his generals and rallying his men? No. Was he even stationed on a hilltop in visual support of his troops? No.

David was back home in Jerusalem clearly with too much time on his hands, right?

Look at verse 2. “It happened, late one afternoon.”

David was strolling around his estate and was distracted by something more than the lovely springtime air. Out of respect for our gathering of worship here today and given the nature of the story it's not worth going into too much detail about what happens next. But let me say this. At this time David was a married man and Bathsheba was a married woman. It is also worth noting that it is David whom the text is most critical of in this interaction.

What I would really like us to focus on is how diabolical David was towards Bathsheba's husband, Uriah; first, in trying to make Bathsheba's pregnancy look like it was *from* Uriah, and then when that doesn't work, eliminating Uriah quickly (meaning, have Uriah killed) so that David could marry Bathsheba in order to obscure the timing of the pregnancy and therefore make it look legitimate. Let's look at verses 6 - 15.

⁶“So David sent word to Joab, ‘Send me Uriah the Hittite.’ And Joab sent Uriah to David. ⁷When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. ⁸Then David said to Uriah, ‘Go down to your house, and wash your feet.’ Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. ⁹But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. ¹⁰When they told David, ‘Uriah did not go down to his house’, David said to Uriah, ‘You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?’ ¹¹Uriah said to David, ‘The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing.’ ¹²Then David said to Uriah, ‘Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.’ So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, ¹³David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

¹⁴“In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. [!!!] ¹⁵In the letter he wrote, ‘Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die.’”

Can you imagine being Uriah? If you recall, the whole time, David was trying to manipulate the situation with Uriah to make it look like the child in Bathsheba's womb was the child *of* Uriah instead of David, that whole time Uriah maintained his honor, his uprightness, and his conviction to living a life that would, by many estimations, be beyond reproach (his drunkenness notwithstanding).

How stark is the contrast between David's unfaithfulness to Uriah's faithfulness (on so many levels). The mercy - if you could call it that - toward Uriah in all this, is that it seems that he is unaware of any of the circumstances of David and Bathsheba's adultery, and equally unaware of David's evil intent to ultimately have Uriah killed.

I want to draw a comparison, so stay with me here.

But let's imagine this story of Uriah again, and imagine Uriah doing everything the same as he did, only this time imagine that Uriah was also fully aware of what was going on: the adultery, the cover up, the murder. Imagine him being fully aware. That changes it, doesn't it?

Now stay with me, because that got me thinking about God and his faithfulness as compared to our own unfaithfulness. Because many times throughout the Bible God talks about his relationship with his people using the analogy of marriage - God as the groom and his people as the bride. In this Biblical analogy God is married to his people. Isn't it interesting that it is the bond of marriage that God often uses to describe his relationship with his people?

But as we've seen with Uriah and Bathsheba there are times when a marriage is put to the test by infidelity, adultery. What would it feel like to know that your spouse has betrayed you, that they mocked and belittled the vows that you made to each other by engaging in relations that impersonate the physical relations that are only to be allowed within the vows of marriage? In other words, to

physically intimately behave *as if* you are married to someone else while actually being *truly* married to another. What would it feel like?

That is idolatry. Insidious and fiendish manipulation of the truth - crafting a lie to appear as if it were true. If you carve an idol and worship it, what are you doing but crafting and worshipping an empty and hollow trinket to mimic the worship of the only God who has ultimate power over all things.

But the true insidious nature of idolatry comes to light when you think of it like adultery. Because adultery doesn't inherently mean that you leave your spouse to take another - or in this comparison to idolatry - to carve an idol to worship instead of God. No, the fiendish nature of hidden idolatry is when you take another *non-divine* thing and elevate it to the status of being equal to the divine or thereby being God-ordained, or in this comparison to marriage - to take another person that you aren't married to and elevating them to the same physical intimate privileges of marriage, while still maintaining your true marriage to someone else. Idolatry isn't simply denying God (like leaving one's spouse), it's allowing other things or people to share the same space and privilege of God - in God's eyes it's like sharing the marriage bed with someone else all, while still professing commitment to God.

This is precisely what Israel did for most of their ancient history as a nation. Rarely, did ancient Israel completely deny Yahweh and exclusively worship another god. Or in our marriage analogy, rarely did Israel leave their spouse of Yahweh and exclusively take another spouse. No, what Israel often did was add other gods into their worship practices - keeping Yahweh, while adding Baal or Asherah or a golden calf. We might call that, "playing the field" while still being married.

So let's come back to Uriah. Remember how I wondered what it would feel like to be Uriah, behaving uprightly through it all, while still knowing what David and Bathsheba had done and how David was conspiring to cover it up and then ultimately conspired to have him killed. Imagine knowing all that and still remaining faithful through it all.

That. is. God.

Knowing full well how we have betrayed him, how we have sought to cover it up, and how we nailed him to a cross in the hopes of concealing our darkness. Knowing full well, God still chooses to be married to us and to honor his end of the commitment - his end of the vows that we take at our baptism. He still chooses us! That is grace. That is mercy. That is love, not born out of feelings and emotions, but love that is doggedly built through a determined commitment to a demonstrated preference for the well-being of us, over and above himself, even at great personal expense.

I know Uriah wasn't perfect, and we have no reason to believe he knew what was going on with King David's actions and conspiracy. But today I want to give thanks for Uriah because *his* faithfulness and commitment has served as a lens to imagine and marvel at the vast measure of God's faithfulness and commitment to us.

And so for Uriah, and most importantly, for God, I say, Thanks be to God! *Amen.*