

August 1st, 2021

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13 “Revealing Truth Amidst Lies”

I need to share a joy with you this morning. The two most popular lectionaries that preachers use for sermon preparation are the New Common Lectionary and the more recent Narrative Lectionary. A lectionary, for those of you who don't know, is a list of weekly scriptures that help preachers lead their congregations through the Bible. The reason some of us use a lectionary is so we don't skip unpleasant texts like say, David and Bathsheba from last week. They help us stay honest and disciplined. I, like most preachers who follow a lectionary, use the New Common Lectionary rather than the Narrative Lectionary. And thank God because the Narrative Lectionary lists the story of Amnon and Tamar as the reading for this week. You think the story of David and Bathsheba was rough? This one would have been *much* worse, but when I flipped my calendar over and saw my preaching schedule, I found out I was wrong. Whew! What we have today is the story of Nathan's response to the David and Bathsheba fiasco from last week. So, thanks be to God. It was hard enough dealing with Amnon and Tamar in Bible study a few weeks ago. I can't imagine how I'd handle a sermon on that text. So yeah, that's my joy this week.

Last week we read about how King David of Israel stayed home in his palace when he was *supposed* to be out on the battlefield defending his kingdom. While he was home at the palace, he impregnated another man's wife and then, to cover it up, sent that man out on a suicide mission where he was killed in battle. This week, we get to see the fallout and repercussions of his actions. But in order to go there we need to be reintroduced to David's prophet Nathan. The last time we saw Nathan, he was telling David that God didn't need a big temple because a big temple would become a symbol of *separation* between God and humans rather than a symbol of God's *presence* among humans. To be honest, Nathan started out as kind of a “yes man” in David's court. Every now and then he'd push back on something David said or did, but he never really had to call David out on anything big. But up until now,

David really hadn't done anything that warranted a major callout. He was arrogant. He treated his wives more like property than life-partners. He had a hard time distinguishing what *he* wanted and what *God* wanted. But taking another man's wife, impregnating her and having her husband killed? This was a whole different level of transgression. This was a total disregard for what God called him to do and be. This was an *insult* to God. So it's time for Nathan to have a "come to Jesus meeting" with David 980 years before Jesus was even born!

Generally speaking, the more powerful a person gets ... especially if that person is in a position of authority ... the less likely they are to listen to wise counsel. How many leaders do you know who have ignored wise counsel at their own peril? They have plenty of advisors on staff. They pay these advisors to say things like, "Sir? That's not a very good idea." Or "Ma'am? I would strongly suggest you not do that." But it seems like a lot of leaders fail miserably because they just don't listen to good counsel. Maybe it's because they didn't have a counselor as wise and skillful as Nathan.

Before I say too much about Nathan, I need to make another one of my little confessions. And it may not be that much of a surprise because I've been with you all for over a decade now, and I think you're all pretty familiar with my strengths and deficits. Read for this one? I sometimes feel that I like dogs more than humans. And I say this because I can watch a movie where people are dying left and right and I'm relatively unfazed. The minute a dog dies, I am a blubbering mess. So I avoid watching movies where a dog might die. But people trick me into watching movies like *Marley and Me* and *I Am Legend* where the dog dies near the end. I never got into the *House of Cards* series because the main character killed a dog 10 minutes into the first episode. That's a "no go" as far as I'm concerned. The exception to the rule is a movie called *John Wick*. The main character's dog was killed by Russian mobsters in the first 14 minutes of the movie. The dog was the last connection that John Wick had with his wife who died of a terminal illness. The dog was the only thing that kept him from taking his own

life. So the remainder of the movie and two sequels after was basically about John Wick killing Russian mobsters for killing his dog. I know this level of fondness for dogs probably isn't very healthy, but I pay counselors and therapists to help me work through it. I'm sure I really do care more about human lives than I do animals, but I've got a way to go before I can say it with confidence and conviction.

Anyway, *this* is how Nathan gets through to David. And I know this sounds like a stretch but hear me out. Nathan tells David a story about a poor man who domesticates a lamb. Not a dog. A lamb. He brings the lamb into his house and feeds it from the table. He lets the lamb lay on him. He *loves* this lamb. He treats it like one of his children. In fact, the author comes right out and says, "it was like a daughter to him." Meanwhile there's a rich man nearby who has a huge flock of sheep. When the rich man plays host to a traveling guest, rather than feeding the guest with a sheep from his own flock, he goes to the poor man's house and kills the guy's lamb to feed his guest. Why? Because the rich man has no pity, no mercy and is a despicable human being. And this story set David off. He was *mad*. He was saying, "What!?! How could that rich man take away that poor guy's pet lamb? That man deserves to be put to *death!*" And Nathan said, "You are that man." And he went on to tell David that the way he treated Bathsheba and the way he arranged her husband's death and the way he strayed so far away from God's path, even after God had blessed him with so much, was every bit as despicable, if not more, than the rich man who killed the poor man's pet lamb. "Now tell me David, what did you say that rich man deserved?" Ouch. Hats off to Nathan though. To call out a king takes courage. But to do it in way so that the King recognizes his own sin and *repents*? That takes skill. That's the kind of prophetic voice that every person in leadership should have among their advisors. But who am I to talk? Obviously I didn't listen to my advisors when they said, "It's probably not a good idea to say that you like dogs more than people from the pulpit."

After David heard Nathan's parable and how he was like the rich man in the story, David said, "I have sinned against the Lord." How many times do you ever hear that from a world leader who has been busted for their sin? Yet here's David repenting of his sin. Then Nathan said to David, "Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die." Good news for David? In the big picture, yes. David learned that God is a loving God and that when we repent, God throws our sins as far as the east is from the west. But David also learned that there are real-time consequences for our sins too. He doesn't get a bye. There is a price to pay. Or as my middle son Cameron learned in the Navy, "If you play stupid games, you get stupid prizes."

Here's what happened to David – God said, "The sword will never leave your house." In other words, violence begets violence. This marks the end of the "happy days" for David, his family, and for the entire nation of Israel. The rest of his life will be marked with family dissension, political discord, bloodshed and sorrow. David's infant son that Bathsheba bore died. Then David's son Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar. Then as act of revenge, Tamar's brother, David's other son, kills Amnon. Then Absalom rebels against David and lays siege to city of Jerusalem forcing David to flee for his life. After that, Absalom abducts David's harem of concubines and leaves the city. Finally, Absalom is killed by the only person David sort of trusts and that sends David into a depression spiral that lasts until his final day as King. Yes, God forgives David, but there are still consequences for David's sin.

We, like David, are often blind to any real awareness of what we are doing. People in power, like David, are often blinded by a belief in their own importance and their own uniqueness. They'll think, "Hey, c'mon, someone like me who does so much for the people deserves a little slack, a little comfort, a little self-indulgence, right?" The rest of us probably don't have that level of grandeur, but we get blinded in other ways. Think about how many times we look at our pasts and realize we've done some pretty bad things that, at the time, seemed perfectly normal and appropriate for the times we lived in: Jokes we told,

prejudices we held, or how we treated people who weren't like us. Having our eyes opened to past sins we've committed is painful. And I don't think most sins are because of calculating corrupt decisions we've made. I think we commit them because we are entangled in systems and worldviews and cultural perspectives that blind us to the ways our actions are harmful to the lives of others. We become participants in terrible, dehumanizing sins without even realizing it. If a modern-day prophet comes along pointing a finger at me and telling a parable about wealthy people whose cell phones and designer jeans come from supply chains full of child slavery and sweatshops, maybe I'm going to feel put on the spot. And like David, I might be able to recognize my own guilt without being able to name the victims, because these structures of evil deliberately keep me in the dark.

But beware of being like David and exploding into rage at the sins of others while remaining blind to your own. When the prophet declares that our way of life comes at a great price and that this price is being paid by the poor and the broken of the world, are we going to have the humility and integrity to acknowledge our guilt and try to reconfigure our lives so we can live compassionately while caring for the "least of these" as Jesus calls us to do? Or are we going to keep our world neatly divided into who and what we've always been told is "good" or "bad" no matter how that contradicts what Jesus teaches? Here's something to think about - Spectacular sinners like David and ordinary yet hopelessly entangled sinners like us are all gathered into God's mercy and love. When we recognize this, the invitation to us is the same as the one we see David responding to as his story continues to unfold. We are invited into the often painful, sometimes tragic, but exquisitely beautiful journey of becoming fully human. God is always calling us back to a place of healing where God's generous mercy and love can heal us and restore us.