

July 25th, 2021

2 Samuel 11:1-15 “Covering for Our Mistakes”

As a minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), it is my job to proclaim good news. I know this because that’s what Jesus did. And we’re all about Jesus in the DOC. It was Jesus who stood up in front of his hometown synagogue and said, “The spirit of the Lord has anointed me to preach good news.” That means every time I step behind this pulpit, I’m supposed to have good news for you. And yet I have chosen to preach a series of sermons about Israel’s King David. And everything was *awesome* when David was first getting started. God’s presence was front and center in everything. David seemed to live up to his call of being *God’s* king who will lead Israel. But then he goes and does ... this. And on a day when someone is getting *baptized* for crying out loud. I was cheering for David when God anointed him as the future king of Israel. I was cheering for David when he brought down Goliath. I had a few issues with how he treated his wife Michal, but I appreciated his enthusiasm for bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. I questioned his priorities when he wanted to build a temple for God even when God told him it wasn’t necessary, but still ... David wanted to please God. But this week? This week I am mad at David. No, I’m more than mad at David. I am utterly disgusted with him.

First of all, he was supposed to be out leading his troops in battle. The first verse of chapter 11 says, “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.” Remember that the only reason Israel had a king is because they demanded it. They wanted a king so they could be like the other nations. Well guess what kings from other nations were expected to do in the spring of the year? They were expected to go to battle. David knew this! You go out to do battle so that your subjects are safe from your enemies. But David decided to stay home at his palace while his *officers* went out to do battle. Was it

because God said, “David, I want you to remain in Jerusalem?” No. There is no rhyme or reason for why he stayed in Jerusalem. My guess is that the palace was a comfortable and fun place to be! Why would you *want* to leave?

And how did David decide to spend his time while he was in his comfy palace? Was he asking his prophet Nathan to provide some wise counsel so that he could figure out what God wanted him to do as king? Was he contemplating the covenant that God made with his ancestor Abraham? Was he thinking, “I wonder what I can do to help make Israel the great nation God said it would be?” No. He was at his palace ogling a woman named Bathsheba who happened to be the wife of one of his officers. When he found out that she was Uriah’s wife did he say, “Ohhhh ... I guess she’s off limits” and go back to doing his kingly duties? No. The author wrote, “He sent messengers to get her, and he lay with her.” I don’t see *anything* here that indicates consent on her part. And don’t give me the “well it says he lay *with* her” excuse. That’s just the English translators who sanitized this passage making it sound like there *might* have been consent. And while we’re at it, don’t tell me, “Well she could have said, ‘no’” either. David, like all rulers who have authority, was in a position of power while Bathsheba, like all subjects of his kingdom, was in a position of vulnerability. That’s basic boundaries 101. When the king’s messengers ... plural, not singular ... come knocking on your door to say, “Come with us” what choice do you *really* have?

To complicate matters, David impregnated Bathsheba. Did David say, “Oh dear, I messed that one up. I guess I need to fess up and face the consequences?” No. He pulled her husband off the battlefield in hopes that he would come back and “lay with” his wife so that maybe after he went back to battlefield, he’d come back a year later to a baby that he’d assume was his. When that plan didn’t work out, David went to plan B which was to send Uriah on a suicide mission to cover up his own sin. What a terrible passage of scripture to have to preach on a Sunday morning. What makes it even more difficult is that God is *absent* from

this passage. God is not mentioned here at all. My job is to bring you good news, but for the life of me, I'm having a hard time finding *any* good news here at all.

I think that one of my biggest frustrations has to do with how we, as human beings created in the image of God, seem incapable of learning from our mistakes. The author of the book of Ecclesiastes 1:8-11 writes:

“All things are wearisome; more than one can express; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear filled with hearing. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, ‘See, this is new’? It has already been, in the ages before us. The people of long ago are not remembered, nor will there be any remembrance of people yet to come by those who come after them.”

If we actually learned from history, would we still be reading stories about men in authority abusing their power to take advantage of women? I'm thankful that the #MeToo movement has shed some light on how women are treated by unscrupulous men in power. In the last few years, women have stepped up and put their careers on the line to expose abusers like film producer Harvey Weinstein, US Gymnastics team doctor Larry Nassar, Financier Jeffrey Epstein, and French Photographer Jean-Claude Arnault. Some of the people who've been exposed have shocked and saddened us because they're people who have done so much good in the world like comedian Bill Cosby and R&B singer R. Kelly and celebrity chef Mario Batali. But here's something that I will *never* understand: Why does it seem like world leaders get a “bye” when it comes to using their power to take advantage of women? I know that not everyone gets a bye, but it sure feels like the ones who are at the very top are able to nod and wink their way out of it. As if to say, “Well, that's just one of the perks of being a king! When you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything.”

This is such a difficult scripture to deal with. But let's remember how this whole thing started in the first place. The people of Israel wanted a king. God said, "No, if you have a king, you'll end up having king problems." In fact, God was quite specific about what kind of king problems they'd have all the way back in 1 Samuel 8. A king will use your sons and daughters for whatever purpose he wants, he'll take your grain and your vineyards, he'll take your animals and he'll make you all slaves. "Then you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day." That sure seems to be about what's going on here. And again, where is God? Where is the good news? What am I supposed to be teaching about here? Because if you've been here the last month or two, it seems like every week we come up with some variation of, "humans mess up but God loves us anyway." And I know in my heart of hearts that's true. But this week, we're dealing with something that will change the course of Israel's history forever, and not in a good way.

Are you sure you don't have some good news here pastor? Well, see ... that's the thing. There's *always* good news. And I'm not just talking about the good news here in this story of Israel either. It's true in *all* areas of life. The good news is that God is able to redeem any situation no matter how hopeless it may seem. In the very beginning of 1 Samuel, Samuel's mother Hannah sang a song that proclaimed three truths about God: God will oppose the proud and exalt the humble. Despite human evil, God is at work. And God will raise up a king that will reign to the ends of the earth. Ever since we started this sermon series, we've definitely seen how God opposes the proud and exalts the humble. King Saul was undeniably prideful and God brought him down. David started out humble and God lifted him up, but when David started to behave more and more like Saul, God opposed him, but was still at work. If the earthly King David was not going to be the one who would lead God's people on the path to being a great nation, then God would raise up another king to reign till the ends of the earth. An eternal king. A Messiah King. Which brings us right back to Jesus and the Good News he proclaimed and that *we* now proclaim as well. The Apostle Paul

writes in Romans 8:37-38, “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. And as I said in the beginning, we in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are all about Jesus who is the firm foundation of our Good News which is, “God is reconciling the world to God through Christ.”