

Our reading today is from a text that will be coming up this week in Year of the Bible. Second Samuel opens with the death of King Saul. I don't think I'll be giving anything away by saying that David becomes king after him. And, as king, David sings a song, lamenting the death of God's anointed king Saul. The refrain of this song is "how the mighty have fallen".

David at age 30 becomes king and unites Israel and Judah, the northern and southern regions that generally include the land we today call Israel. And he has everything. And God has even promised him that "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever."

And you know how it is, once you have everything? You tend to want more. Humans have a difficult time being satisfied with what we have. And David sees Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, bathing on her roof. And he wants what he doesn't have. If you are unfamiliar with this story, you'll encounter it in your readings this week, but suffice it to say, he takes what he wants and then he finds a way to get rid of Uriah so that he can marry Bathsheba. And this is where our text picks up today: "But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD, and the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the LORD: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun."

Imagine being the Prophet Nathan.

God comes to you and says, "Remember my favorite son, David? I need you to go to him and tell him how very disappointed I am!"

There is nothing in the text that suggests Nathan was as reluctant as I would be with such an assignment. But surely he paused and thought...*David will kill me. He's God's chosen king. Everyone loves him. Okay, everyone but the family of Uriah the Hittite. Even Saul's own family wanted him to be king instead of Saul. David gets away with everything he wants—how will I make him listen to me long enough to deliver God's message?*

So he tells a story about a man and his lambs. It seems so obvious to us. Can't you imagine it?

Nathan says, "O king, let me tell you a story."

"Oh goodie!" David says. "I love stories!"

"There was a man. And he had lots of lambs, including a lamb that was the daughter of the previous king. And there was another man. And he only had one lamb. His one lamb liked to bathe on the rooftop."

Okay, Nathan wasn't quite that obvious.

Because David falls for the trap. "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity!!!"

David quickly and easily pronounces judgment on this lamb stealer. But in real life, in the world where David has taken another man's wife, the judgment is neither quick or easy. Because Uriah the Hittite is dead. His life can't be restored.

Bathsheba's honor can't really be restored either. And punishing David is tricky too. Because the people love him. God loves him. And God has promised him that God's hesed, his steadfast love, shall never depart from David's house.

But Nathan pronounces God's judgment—*you are that man! God gave you EVERYTHING and if that wasn't enough, God would have given you MORE! And while God's steadfast love will never depart from your house, now the sword will never depart from your house. What you did secretly, God will do to you publicly.* How the mighty have fallen indeed.

While this passage is about the aftermath of David's sexual misbehavior and sin, it is not only about that. David's last phrase, when he pronounces judgment on the lamb stealer is, "because he had no pity". The word in Hebrew means more than pity. It means compassion, mercy, concern for your fellow human being.

So David, himself, correctly identifies the broader issue in his situation. He had no compassion. He didn't care about those around him.

But how could David not see the connection between David's wives and the man's lambs? One thing I've learned about scripture is that when it is too easy for me to see something, it means I'm missing something. So where is that text playing out in our lives and is it as easy for me as it was for David to miss the connection?

One thought I had was just about the abundance we have as Americans. Now clearly some Americans have much more than others, but 99% of Americans have more than most of the people on this planet. From the safety and peace in which we can live out our daily lives, to size and comforts of our homes and the vast quantity of food at our disposal, we have more and more and more.

And yet, we want more. Our whole economy seems to be built on the premise that we need to keep buying things. I can hear Nathan saying to us, "You are that country! Why do you need more? God has blessed you and yet you keep taking more!"

I don't know if you've followed the climate change treaties lately. I have not read up on them so I'm not advocating a vote one way or another, but I do see the parallels between the United States and King David. We are arguing that China should cut their emissions, because China is the number one contributor to Carbon Dioxide pollution with 21.5 %. The United States is the second highest contributor of Carbon Dioxide pollution at 20.2%. It sounds as if America's participation in emission reduction will require China to make concessions first.

But the emissions numbers are only a part of the story. Because China also has 19.6% of the world's population. The United States? We have 4.5% of the world's population.

On some level, shouldn't it make sense that 20% of the world's population would emit 20% of the world's carbon dioxide?

Yet we are refusing to reduce our emission levels until China does, even though we're using, proportionally, way more than we should. Listening to the debate on climate change made me think of Nathan's announcement to David—You are that man! You are that country that is taking far more than you need, far more than your share!

And hopefully you have discerned this about me already, but I am always preaching to myself. Hopefully I preach to you sometimes as well. But I drove here this morning in my SUV. I am not saying **you** need to change. I'm saying **WE**, as a nation, need to consider how our living impacts the planet and the other 6 billion people with whom we share it. How much is enough?

I thought of another parallel to the David story, of wanting more than you need, from our reading in 1 Corinthians last week. In Chapter 11, Paul is talking to them about communion practices. When Paul's communities celebrated communion, it was an actual meal. They would gather around the table and eat dinner. And each of them brought their own food. But in Corinth, at least, it doesn't sound like they were sharing their food.

If Southminster were Corinth, some of you would have brought peanut butter sandwiches from home and would be drinking a glass of water at communion today. Others of you would have ordered pizza and brought a few 2 liters of soft drinks. And still others of you would have brought huge feasts of prime rib and \$100 scotch. So, imagine how welcome you would feel at the Lord's table if all you had to bring was a sandwich, and it looked as if everyone around you was getting drunk on fine wine and expensive food. How would it feel if your neighbor had a huge bottle of wine, saw your empty cup, and didn't offer you any? As David would say, they had no compassion, no care for each other.

Here is what Paul had to say to them.

“For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper.

For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What!? Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

It may be difficult for us to recognize ourselves in this Corinthians text because our communion practices are so different than theirs were. And when we do have actual meals, all are invited and we share. Who knew there was scriptural justification for potluck meals?

And while everyone who is in this room is certainly invited to this table—who is not here? Are there people who don't feel welcome in our midst? Are there other ways that our church practices serve to divide rather than to build up?

Today is World Communion Sunday, which started in the Presbyterian Church in 1936, and quickly spread to other denominations across the world. On this day,

especially, we remember that as Christians, we are a part of a much larger body of Christ than this congregation, or this presbytery, or this denomination. We will come to this table and celebrate the same meal as will our brothers and sisters in Pocatello, Poughkeepsie, and Poland.

And the inequities that divide us, the differences that get in our ways, can be overcome because of who invites us to this Table. If this were our table, we'd likely find ways to keep people out, or make conditions about who can come. But this is not our Table. It is Christ who invites us to God's Table.

This morning we also collect the Peacemaking Offering. This offering is one of the denominational offerings that we collect each year. Part of the money will stay here in this community. The rest of it will go to work for peace throughout the world. As we come to the Table and give to this offering, we have the opportunity to participate in something much bigger than us. We can make a difference in the world by remembering to have compassion for our brothers and sisters in this room and our brothers and sisters around the world. Let us set aside the things that divide us so that we may come together at this Table, where there is room for all, and where everyone can get what they need. Amen.