

2 Samuel 11:1-15

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.

It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. Then 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. But 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. When 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?" Uriah 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." Then 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, David 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.

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In 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."

Ephesians 3:14-21

I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

John 6:1-21

Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that

nothing may be lost.” So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.”

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

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A few weeks back, I talked about the David and Bathsheba story, which we got to hear this morning. I used the story to talk about power...what power is, how we can use power faithfully, how it can be abused. Today, starting with this same story, I want to talk about the dynamics of sin.

So first, did Bathsheba sin? There are those who have said, over the years, that she was deliberately trying to be noticed and so shared some blame. Others say, even if it wasn't deliberate, she was negligent... “bathing in a place so clearly open to the king's palace...”¹

I don't agree with this. I actually think it was a #metoo moment. It is often thought and said, that Bathsheba was bathing on a roof. Commentators and paintings bolster this take on things. And that might argue that she was being deliberate.

But a close reading of the text reveals that we don't know where Bathsheba was.² We aren't told. We only know where David was. David was walking about on the roof, and from the roof, and saw a woman bathing. So Bathsheba could have been in an enclosed garden, or even have been seen through a window. We don't know. There is no reason to assume she was trying to be provocative. And the text “shows no interest in Bathsheba's guilt in the matter and does not suggest (she had done anything wrong). The narrator lays the moral responsibility entirely on David.”³

So let's talk about why David sinned.

One of my professors said, all sin starts with amnesia, spiritual amnesia. This is not talking about a simple loss of memory...where are my car keys, or even a more serious issues driven by changes in the body or brain. This is a theological statement, sin begins with amnesia. That is: “The action of sin is preceded by the forgetting of God, who (God) is, who (God) says (we) are, and what (God) promises (to us as beloved) children.”⁴

If you read the Old Testament stories, you hear this over and over. The people forgot, and then they sinned. Judges 2:8 Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten years. So they buried him...in the hill country of Ephraim...Moreover, that whole generation was gathered to their ancestors, and another generation grew up after them, who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel. (And then, the very next verse, the very next thing that happens...) Then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD...”

¹ The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume 2, page 1284.

² <http://leighpowers.com/2013/09/05/5-reasons-bathsheba-wasnt-the-one-on-the-roof/>

³ ibid

⁴ <http://www.churchatthegates.org/judges-26-36-week-2-amnesia-and-apostasy/>

Clearly David has forgotten who God was, who God had said he was, and what was promised to him as king, what his purpose was. And with that, David sins boldly...and doesn't even give it a second thought, doesn't even know it is a sin. It takes an intervention by the prophet Nathan to bring him back to his senses. We'll hear about that intervention next week. David forgot...David had amnesia.

I'd also like to suggest, that if sin begins with amnesia...amnesia is enabled by isolation. Now, Jesus has shown us and taught us, that stopping, that taking time apart is a good thing. In Mark's gospel, after the murder of John the Baptist, Jesus says to his followers, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."

So when I say "isolation", I am not talking about quiet time or a retreat or Sabbath time or anything like that. I am talking about a state of desolation, a complete emotional detachment from others....an existential state that is harmful for human beings, who are created to be in community. That is why solitary confinement is such a brutal punishment.

When we get isolated, we don't have people around us who can tell us the truth. We don't have support. We don't have care. We don't have people to remind us who and whose we are. We haven't got any one to love and to support in turn. And we need that. We can't raise ourselves and we can't sustain ourselves alone.

So you see in this story... in the spring of the year, David is not with Joab, the commander of the army, or all the officers, or indeed he is not with all Israel...he has sent them all away. He is all by himself. And that's when he forgets who and whose he is. Isolation and amnesia drives him toward sin.

The antidote to this sad tale of David...a tale of sin driven by isolation and amnesia, is community and memory...connection with others and with God's story and God's truth for every human being. The antidote is in fact exactly what it is we are doing right now, right here.

Our gospel story this morning, the feeding of the five thousand, can be read as a meditation on the Holy Eucharist. We take, bless, break, and give the bread ...just like in the story it is a miracle, a sign of God's grace, we too are filled, to overflowing, with blessings left over.

The central prayer of the Eucharist, the Great Thanksgiving is about remembering...we recite the whole story of salvation history, from creation on. We remember who God is, we remember who we are, we remember what God has done for us and what Christ Jesus has done. And as we receive, our union with Christ and with one another is strengthened.⁵ We reach up, but also out, with our arms. Eucharist is all about memory and community.

The antidote to David's sad tale of isolation and amnesia is also about baptism. This foundational sacrament empowers memory and community. With the blessing at the water, we remember God's mighty acts. Listen for it today, from the waters of creation, to the waters of the Red Sea, and on from there. And we come together as a community to pledge to do all in our power to support the candidates in their life in Christ. As a community, we receive Susan and George into the household of God so that they can share with us in Christ's eternal priesthood.

By your presence and participation here today, you are doing exactly what you need to be doing, to combat the isolation and amnesia which lead to sin. And this is the good news. You are putting on the whole armor of God. You are gaining the power to know the love of Christ, you are being filled with all the fullness of God....to quote the Letter to the Ephesians.

Now I don't mean to say we are perfect. In the real world and in the church itself, there is no one who is perfectly whole or hopelessly corrupt. In the real world and in the church itself, there are only those who are being healed or those who are getting sick.⁶ There are only those who are remembering God and who they are, or those in the process of forgetting. Those who enjoy the support of community and those who are desperately isolated. Today, our worship, this community, these blessings, they all put us on the road to healing, to memory, to community.

⁵ Outline of Faith, Book of Common Prayer

⁶ The Theology of Preaching, by Richard Lischer, page 56.

And as Martin Luther taught, this is not just something we do on Sunday, we are called to daily baptismal renewal. As Luther taught, baptism means “that the old person in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily sorrow for sin and through repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”⁷ Sunday worship in community is the fuel, it is the grace we need to carry over into every day and every moment .

This moment. This worship. This communion. This Holy Baptism is nothing other than the fullness of God’s blessing and grace. So let us rejoice, and be glad in it. Amen.

⁷ <http://ctkelc.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Martin-Luthers-Small-Catechism.pdf>