

The story of David and Bathsheba is possibly the most famous adulterous scandal in history. There is usually instant recognition when their two names are mentioned. It cannot be denied that the Bible deals with real life events that rival the best soap opera.

But this story is much more than a story about adultery. It tells us what happens when David the shepherd boy with an intimate relationship with God, a relationship that directed his life and made him to be king, becomes David *the King* who now takes power into his own hands and acts upon it. It's the contrast between one who follows God and one who grasps at what is desired. It's the difference between humility as God's servant and hubris to covet and take what does not belong to one.

One might say that David has too much time on his hands. “The idle mind is the devil's workshop,” so to speak. Before this event David has been engaged in fighting battles in the service of his people and under God's guidance. Now he's surrounded by the luxuries of kingship, living in his house of cedar which we talked about last week, and he gets distracted from his truest purposes: to be a servant king, servant to both God and his people.

The story is pretty straight-forward. But one thing is not always talked about and that is the way Bathsheba is *used*. Becky's poem reminds us that Bathsheba is not given a choice here. Because she's beautiful, because she's desired by David, it doesn't matter that she belongs to another man; it doesn't matter that she is Uriah's wife. She's used for David's pleasure. This story reminds us of the many instances, even in today's news, when powerful people use their positions to make others mere subjects to their desires.

David's using, David's grasping, David's covetousness has consequences, and Bathsheba becomes pregnant. As though this isn't bad enough, David initiates a cover-up. He tries to employ Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, as part of his cover-up by bringing him home from the battle and suggesting he lie with his wife. This way the pregnancy cannot be pinned on David. Who will know that the child is not Uriah's? But Uriah the faithful warrior will not take sexual pleasure while other men are fighting the king's battle. **His ethics get in the way of David's lack of ethics.** When the cover-up doesn't work, there's nothing left to do but eliminate Uriah so that Bathsheba may become David's wife. Adultery, cover-up, murder--all too common story lines. Even then the consequences continue to play out: the child dies, Bathsheba is left without child or husband. As Becky's poem puts it in Bathsheba's words: *When the child dies, taken as your lesson, I stand beneath the sky unprotected, and raise my voice to a god I had never dared to face. I fall to the ground, raking the dirt, left without the husband I needed, without a child to love, left with a king who needs me no longer.* (Becky Guess Cantor, *Letters to Mary Magdalene*)

There are consequences for King David as well; he forever lives with these consequences which have ramifications to both his subjects and his kingdom.

Again, this is more than a story of adultery. The big picture of this story is that we can easily forget who we are and whose we are. We can preoccupy ourselves with what we want so that we don't notice when we cross the line **of grasping from our own desires rather than receiving the gracious gift of life that is unfolding before us.** Humility doesn't always come naturally to us human beings.

In our heart of hearts we long to be true to God and to God's creation. We try to remember that we are not the focus of the universe, but that we are only one among the throngs of creatures and creation that God so loved. What can we do in order to fix our hearts on God and discipline ourselves for faithful living?

One way is to come together with others who share our same purposes. We can do things as a church that we cannot do alone. While it is true that nature in all its glory can help us feel close to the divine, and heal our souls, it is within communities that we live day in and day out, and those communities we choose can support us for good or encourage us to do ill. This is why we teach our children that their peers are so important. Other people can bring out the best or worst in us, and we are at our best when we surround ourselves with those who support and affirm our most authentic and best selves. The best marriages I know of are those that enable each person to be their best selves.

Another way to discipline our lives so that we fix our hearts on God is through service. In my own life, I know that the times I am the best are those times when I am thinking of others and serving others. I can easily create my own pity party when I dwell on what isn't the way I want it to be. As the saying goes: *sometimes it is easier to work yourself into a new way of thinking than to think yourself into a new way of being*. When I put myself to work serving others, I get in touch with the larger needs of our world, the same needs that call on God's attention become focused in my mind, and consequently, I am more on the same page as God is on.

I will briefly mention one more way in which we can focus our lives on faithful living--brief only because I think I'll be preaching a whole sermon on it soon, and that is prayer. Walter Rauschenbusch was known as the leader of the social gospel in the 19th century; the social gospel was a Christian response to social problems like child labor early in the industrial revolution. He writes: *...if the effect of our prayers goes beyond our own personality; if there is a center of the spiritual universe in whom our spirits join and have their being; and if the mysterious call of our souls somehow reaches and moves God, so that our longings come back from God in ways of divine assent that assures their ultimate fulfillment--then it may mean more than anyone knows to set Christendom praying on our social problems.* (*Resistance*, ed. John Cobb, p. 34) Prayer draws us into divine relationship.

Community, service and prayer--all ways to keep our hearts on God. In the next couple of weeks we will see how King David's community of advisors influence him for ill; we will witness the possibility for David's redemption and renewed relationship through David's returning to serving God's purposes; and the humility of being opened that prayer offers. Stay tuned for the rest of the story.