

This past week while I was visiting Tina Nelson, she told me that David was one of her favorite people in the Bible. We talked about how David demonstrates the best of human beings as well as human being’s major shortcomings. On the one hand, the 23rd Psalm that Tina mentioned beautifully portrays his closeness and intimacy with God. They are words of one who trust completely in God’s loving care.

On the other hand, last week we studied David the King who got caught up in being his own king rather than a king in service to God. David is such a good case study in what it means to be human; perhaps this is why we can see some of ourselves in his life’s story and hopefully, learn from it.

In today’s text God summons the prophet Nathan speaks to David. Now, David was likely surrounded by “yes” men who told him what he wanted to hear; yet, David continued to honor the tradition in Israel of giving deference to the word of the prophets. Nathan was wise enough to present a David a parable. To do otherwise would have been dangerous; because it is always easier for us humans to see the “speck in our neighbor’s eye and not notice the log in our own.” (Matt.7:3)

Upon hearing the parable David a wise king used to passing judgments, clearly sees what’s right and wrong, and insists on punishment for the rich man who had so many lambs but chose to take the poor man’s one and justice for that poor man. After David passes judgment, the words come, “You are the man.” In fact, Walter Bruggemann says that the David and Bathsheba story can be summed up with three short statements: Bathsheba says: “I am pregnant.” Nathan says: “You are the man.” And David says: “I have sinned.”

(I am going to quote from Bruggemann, *Interpretation*, John Knox Press, because he says it so succinctly.)

David thought no one would notice, but he failed to reckon with the seeing eyes of Yahweh and the discerning word of Nathan. We might conclude David has no option; he was caught re-handed and had to confess. But in fact he did not have to confess.

A lesser man--perhaps his son Solomon--would not have confessed but would have eliminated the prophet instead. The elimination of Nathan could have been easily done, but David did not move against Nathan. David’s confession comes very late, but at least David has submitted. In the eleventh hour, David acknowledges himself to be a child of the Torah.

There is not much to celebrate about David in this narrative. The narrator nevertheless wants us to notice two things about this portrayal of David. First, concerning David, it is evident that David still has a considerable degree of moral courage and sensitivity. He is able to face up to his real situation.

Second, concerning the gospel, though it is late in the narrative, it is not too late for David’s repentance. David is a man who is still willing and able to cast himself on Yahweh’s mercy (cf. 24:14). Yahweh is a God who will extend mercy to such a person. By the end of the narrative, David has abandoned his presumed moral autonomy and has resubmitted to the covenantal governance of Israel’s faith.

We watch how costly David’s’ words are in verse 13, [just] as we watched the anguish of a Richard Nixon who could not speak these same words, [or a Bill Clinton who lied before he could bring himself to say them or a whole list of names you might add to those

leaders who have disappointed us when pride got the best of them and kept them from admitting their mistakes] **and we watch the deathliness of refus[ing to say those words: I have sinned.]**

But David was able! He is not unscarred. Indeed, David will never be whole and free again. But he can live, and he begins anew. There is cost (v. 14), but David may live(v. 13).

The child born of David and Bathsheba does not die immediately (v. 18). The child, much treasured by David, came to David at great cost, great humiliation, great shame and dismantling. This is the child he tried to pawn off on Uriah. Now the child is sick and David wills him life with all his power. He fasts and prays (v. 16).

With the death of the child, it is time for a great show of grief; but not for David (v. 28). [He has already grieved.] Painful as his grief [has been], David moves quickly from the feeble realm of death to the vitality of life.

He dresses, he worships, and he eats (v. 20). He resumes life. His advisers did not expect his great grief earlier, nor did they expect him to shake off the grief so soon (v. 21). David is a man of vigor and of faith, however. He is not fatalistic but he will live boldly in the present, ready to turn loose of what is lost and face life where he now is. (pp.282-284, *Interpretation.*)

It is interesting that before the child dies and in spite of the fact that Bathsheba and David are now married, Bathsheba is consistently called “the wife of Uriah.” And even in Matthew’s genealogy where other women are recorded by their given names, Bathsheba is still called “wife of Uriah.” The truth is she will always be first and foremost Uriah’s wife rather than David’s wife. Today in our worship we balance the lack of naming of Bathsheba and other women in the Bible, with the singing and celebrating of dancing Sarah’s circle in our closing hymn.

There’s a lot to learn from this story summed up in these three revelatory phrases: “I am pregnant. You are the man! I have sinned.” We are reminded with Bathsheba’s words “I am pregnant” how women have been used and subjugated throughout history. I received an email this week announcing former President Jimmy Carter’s break with the Southern Baptist Convention after his life long devotion to that denomination because they will not allow women to be ordained into the ministry.

We learn from Nathan’s words: “You are the man!” the courage it takes to speak truth to power--courage like that of Walter Cornet who’s very courage earned him the title of the “most trusted man in America.” Even President Johnson acknowledged the power of Cronkite’s judgment about the Vietnam War.

And we learn from David the power of confession with his words: “I have sinned.” David’s honesty in telling the truth when it the truth was hard to tell, when there were consequences still to be played out, but when there was also a chance for redemption is a lesson for us today of God’s great love, a love making possible a future of hope even in the midst of all it means to us to be human beings made in God’s image and yet, far from being God. For God’s gift of forgiveness, mercy, and grace--thanks be to God!