

August 1, 2021
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2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

(Un)likely Leadership: Lessons for everyday people

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

New Revised Standard Version

When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.

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." David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan said to David, "Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die.

This is the part of the story that we like. YOU did this! That kind of direct-assault almost never works, but the prophet Nathan has a sting operation of a parable. A good parable sneaks around the defenses that we put up. It reminds me of comedy, a comic can tell us the biting truth about ourselves and then we realize we are laughing.

Last week we heard the story of the great king David's greatest mistake. While his army was out fighting the enemies of Israel, David remained at home, reclining on his couch, concerned only with his own desires. One day his desires led him to sleep with a woman named Bathsheba, who was married to one of his greatest warriors, and she became pregnant. David called Bathsheba's husband Uriah back home from the battle and tried unsuccessfully to get him to sleep with his wife and thus conceal the adulterous pregnancy. Desperate to cover up what he has done, David digs himself even deeper into trouble and sends Uriah back to battle with orders that will lead to his certain death. Having taken his warrior's wife as an object of sexual gratification, David kills this noble man to cover his own tracks. It is a story of adultery and murder. It is a story of utter failure by Israel's greatest hero. It is a story that leaves us longing for redemption.

Remember the people wanted a king. God was their king, but the people wanted a human one anyway. Samuel told them kings take because with power comes taking. However, when kings take, God raises up prophets and a prophet made David the king fall to his knees.

Nathan uses a parable for David to condemn himself for killing Uriah and stealing his wife, Bathsheba. Nathan frames his story as a legal case of injustice, theft, and abuse of power and David does his kingly duty passing judgment on this case because it is a clear case of injustice, theft, and abuse of power. The rich man stole the only lamb of a poor man. When Nathan speaks truth to power and tells David you did this, he exposes David's hypocrisy and strips away all of the self-justifications that David had given for why it was okay to steal

Bathsheba away. David is the powerful man who abused his power taking not a lamb but a man's wife and a man's life. David is the guilty one. David realizes the enormity of his sin and seems convicted, he says, "I have sinned against the Lord." David's immediate and direct confession of sin is almost as surprising as Nathan's climatic, "You are the man!"

The fifty-first psalm is attributed to David as he expresses his regret. We're going to say it together before Communion today. David confesses his sin to Nathan and repents and Nathan assures him of God's forgiveness. David has committed crimes and there will be consequences. Tragedies will result. When we mess up and sin, we feel guilty. I am not the only one here, right? Guilt is not the goal of prophetic speech. Nathan didn't want David to feel guilty because guilt looks backward for something that cannot be undone. David confesses and repents by turning and going in a new direction. He goes in a new direction away from patterns of brokenness. We are not left in guilt but we are called to repentance, to walk in a new direction.

When we mess up, God forgives us restoring our relationship with God and with each other. Every morning God washes away our sins in an ocean of forgiveness, but it doesn't make our actions and their consequences magically disappear. Someone who maxes out their credit cards and has massive debt, still has to pay off the debt.

I can't even imagine how much courage it took for Nathan to speak truth to power. Have you ever had the courage to speak truth to power? If we are going to make a difference like Nathan did, we have to find ways to be heard by those who hold power. Nathan had to get David's attention as he did in the parable. I got a call this week from the Bishop, who is my boss' boss, and he wanted to have a meeting here with some pastors that were going to be at SMU. I said yes, and then about an hour later, I thought, "What will the Bishop think about the rainbow colored banners in Glory Be Hall?" Are we brave enough to speak truth to power? And I knew we are not taking the banners down.

For a little history on the banners, we hung them the week after that horrible worldwide Methodist meeting back in February 2019 when Methodists spent three days debating LGBTQ people. We know that a person cannot be debated and never should be, but that is what happened.

At that meeting, delegates from all over the world voted 53% to 47% to tighten the restrictions on same gender marriage in our churches and on gay clergy. Yes, the Methodist Church believes that all persons are of sacred worth, but the church also says a Methodist church can't have same gender weddings. After that awful worldwide meeting, the next Sunday we had a wonderful meeting in Glory Be Hall where people held their hands up proudly in support of marrying all the people right now. We had been patient long enough and we knew that now it was the time to act. That week we rented scaffolding to hang these banners saying, "We Stay to Stand with our LGBT family." We have God given Nathan-ness as a church here at Greenland Hills. It will be hard for the Bishop to miss our banners when he comes for his meeting. The banners tell our Bishop and his visitors exactly where Greenland Hills stands.

Nathan reminds us that we are all bound together in a common community whether we are rich or poor, gay or straight, Methodist or UCC, powerful or powerless. In that common community the well-being of any one member affects the well-being of the whole. In that common community everyone is ultimately equal, because the fate of all is bound together. In that common community no one receives preferential treatment, because that ends up corrupting the entire community. David reminds us that we can't escape the consequences of our actions. And Nathan reminds us that sometimes we have to speak truth to power.