

1 *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.* **2** *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.* **3** *David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite."* **4** *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.* **5** *The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."* **6** *So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David.* **7** *When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going.* **8** *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.* **9** *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.* **10** *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?"* **11** *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."* **12** *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,* **13** *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.* **14** *In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah.* **15** *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."*

Every good lesson needs a cautionary tale of the consequences of ignoring that lesson.

A few short weeks ago we read of how King David gathered people together and led them in worship...worship so filled with rejoicing that he danced until his linen ephod, his undies, were showing. In gathering, God was glorified. In calling people to worship, David points those gathered to see God's power, not his own. There is our lesson.

Every week, we gather to worship, we are called to look beyond ourselves and our own power and control, and reorient our vision to see as God sees, hear as God hears. When worship is taken for granted, however...when we lose sight of the importance of gathering and calling to worship...we lose sight of God. David lost sight of God. Look how frighteningly easy it was.

The cautionary tale begins with one simple declaration – David was not where David was supposed to be. Lounging around on his couch might seem like a privilege afforded a king but the storyteller makes sure we understand that the king of Israel, the king of God’s people, had other obligations. It was the spring of the year...the time when kings go off into battle. Yet, David sends someone else to do it.

The king who once gathered is now sending out.

The king who once danced is now lying, bored, on a sofa.

The king who was anointed to lead God’s people has passed the buck.

The king who once turned his eyes to God, turns his eyes to his neighbor’s rooftop instead.

David was not doing what God has anointed him to do. Any time we have a gap, a hole, in our lives we will fill it with something. If David isn’t doing what he is meant to do, there is a hole to fill in his life that he will need to fill with something...and sadly, that something is Bathsheba.

This story makes us wildly uncomfortable; no one wants to talk about these things in church, but sometimes we need to be a little uncomfortable. The problem is that when we get uncomfortable we start to find ways to water the story down and make it seem less toxic. A perfect example is how often I have heard this story lifted up as one of the great love stories in scripture. We feel the need to romanticize the story and force its conclusion into the “happy ever after” model. When we do that, however, we miss the point...we ignore the warning.

This is not a story of love or even a story of mutual attraction. This story is about abuse of power and what happens when we lose sight of God and live only for our self because that is exactly what David has done. His power as king is supposed to be used for the good of the people, instead David uses it when, after coveting his neighbor’s wife, he sends his guards to bring her to him. Let’s be clear, this is a story of violence against women. Bathsheba is identified as Eliam’s daughter, Uriah’s wife, David’s infatuation, but nowhere is she identified as a woman who has a choice in what is happening to her or her body. David sends for her, David lays with her, David sends her back home when he is through with her. David is everything we find wrong with a world that believes money and power allows you to do anything you want to other people and get by with it. This is a story of what happens when we cease to gather and decide to go it alone, and in doing so eliminate anyone who will hold us accountable and keep us in check. When David sent his leaders off to war in his place, he remained with a house full of servants and guards intent on doing anything he asked of them and with no agency to argue or say, “I think you should think about this, Sir.”

Look at how many times David could have been redirected. What he did to Bathsheba was bad enough, but every encounter he had with Uriah was an opportunity to be inspired by Uriah's faithfulness and to do better, but David didn't. David only sought to undermine Uriah's goodness by getting him drunk in order to shake lose some of Uriah's morality and faithfulness. Ironically, the only person to tell David no in this entire mess of a story is Uriah, who trusts David with such devotion that he will not be swayed to behave otherwise. One wonders if David orders Uriah's death to cover up the pregnancy or if it was really to eliminate the reminder that Uriah could do what David could not – have unwavering devotion to anything other than himself. There are so many points in which David could have found redemption. He could have confessed to God, to Uriah, to Eliam, to poor Bathsheba. He could have let his confession put an end to the need to cover up his sin and Uriah would have lived to serve another day. But rather can confess, David covered up and covering up is never a one-time event...it takes a spiral of deceit to keep one little lie buried.

Who knows why David made the choices he made. Perhaps we would like to think he was afraid, embarrassed, mortified by what he had done...but my guess is, he simply thought he had enough power to make it go away. Perhaps he really just thought he could continue to escape being held accountable for what he had done and, in that light, with his vision so far away from God, David didn't see anything but that one desire.

Worship not only helps us keep our vision focused on God, it allows God's light to illuminate the dark truth in each of us...not for the purpose of generating shame or guilt...but for the purpose of being held accountable to the power we have and how we use it...for the purpose of being accountability partners with others so that when they seem to abuse their power, we are in a position to say, "I think you should think about what you are doing."

In worship, when we pray a prayer of confession, it is a prayer acknowledging the ways we have missed the mark in being where God wants us to be, or doing what God wants us to do. It is a prayer that intends to open our eyes to the truth of our actions, as ugly as they might be, and to also put trust in God's power to forgive and redeem.

Uriah is not the first or the last we have seen of one murdered for the sake of someone else's abuse of power. Centuries later it would be God's own son, Jesus, condemned to die because someone in power found his presence threatening or upsetting. Yet, Jesus came to show us the power of confession and resurrection. The power of putting our trust in a redeeming God who will shine a light upon our wrongdoing, hold us accountable, offer us a different path, and welcome us home once we find it. There is no shame in doing wrong. The shame is when we keep doing wrong in order to justify our actions or hide them.

Confession allows us to grow and mature in our faith. It allows us to keep our power in check, and we all have some level of power or agency over systems and people, and especially ourselves. Confession is an admission that we aren't perfect, but we want to be...we want to be made more Christ-like and we will not get there offering excuses and justifications for our wrongdoing.

It is true, there is no good news in this story...David took his eyes off God, abandoned his purpose, lived only for himself and the consequences were deadly. But let us rejoice because we do have good news, *Christ died for us while we are yet sinners and this proves God's love for us*. This is the good news we proclaim every time we confess before communion, it is the good news that David, sadly, knew nothing about...that God's love offers forgiveness and the opportunity to change course before more bad choices are made. It won't save us from the consequences of our actions, but it will save us from making them worse.

Our cautionary tale is simple, walk your path alongside others, keep your eyes on God and the purpose God places before you, and if you mess up (and we all do), confess and turn back to God...God who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love...God who is faithful and merciful...God who is forgiving and can be trusted to offer us a better way. May we always be willing to suffer some discomfort in order to see the new path offered us when we are pardoned and set free.