

2 Samuel 11:1-5, 26-27; 12:1-9 Sermon

What happens when you read this ancient text with 21st century eyes? What happens when you hear it with modern ears? How does it fit your contemporary mindset? If I am going to believe that God is still speaking, then I must believe that there are new things we can learn from these old stories. New ways we can approach them. See, I think our theology must happen in context. And in many ways our context has changed from that of the people who originally told this story. Sure, people is people and there's nothing new under the sun, but the context has changed. We've had a few centuries to learn. We've had time to see the long-term effects of our thoughts and actions. And we are given the opportunity to look at it again. With new eyes. Hear it again with new ears. And live it in a new way.

We're going to do a little bit of that with today's text. And I'm going to need you to bear with me because this is the first time I'm saying some of this. But it's how God revealed this text to me and gave me to share it with you.

[Pray with me.]

It's not my fault I'm beautiful. I didn't ask to look this way. Just the luck of birth. Good luck, some might say but sometimes I don't think so. Bad luck for me. But however you look at it... it's not my fault. I was just born. And the mixture of my mother and my dad resulted in me... looking like this. I had nothing to do with it. Okay sure, I do work to keep myself looking good. I mean if God gave me this body then it is my duty to care for it. But it's mostly genetics. Genetics that made me this way and society that determined that looking like me is beautiful. And again... it's not my fault.

It's not my fault that I'm just a woman. I was born this way. God made me who I am. And God said that I was good. Society... you... made who I am lesser. You are the one who diminished my place. It was you who decided to use your clearly superior physical strength to subdue me. It was you who decided that physical strength equals power. But it's clear you don't really know what true power is. Have no clue. Because even with the evil you cause with your perceived power... I stand.

I know we like to pretend that she went willingly. I mean it's an honor to be chosen by the king. I've even heard stories that she was a slut who intentionally placed herself naked in front of a man she knew had impulse control issues. But knowing men like I do, I doubt those stories. King David committed sexual assault. All the evidence suggests that King David raped Bathsheba.

Wait... what? Really Reverend? You gonna say something like that from the pulpit?!

Yes. And it is high time somebody did. Because to not do so would be a violation of my call to preach the truth. And paint it any way you want to... that's the truth! Our hero King David raped the lady Bathsheba.

We read these stories in the bible all the time, but do we really read them? That's what I like about the Narrative Lectionary. It forces us each week to look at scripture as stories. And I'll be honest with you, this story bothers me. And I'll admit there are a lot of stories in the bible that bother me.

Not just for what they say, but also, for what they don't say.

Look at the way it starts. “In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war.” Does anybody else see anything wrong with that? They got a schedule that says come spring... we go off to war. What’s messed up about this is how prevalent war was back then. Like everybody knew come spring... off to war we go. Like the war didn’t end. We just took a break for the winter. I’m reading this story and thinking they were off the CHAIN back then!!! But then I had WNPR on the radio while I was working on the sermon. I listened to the news and realized we’re still in that cycle. We still seem to be in a constant state of war. Except with modern technology we don’t have to wait for spring. We can fight all year long. And war is our answer for everything. Even the stuff we try to do that’s right. War on poverty. War on drugs. War... war... war. What does that say about us? Who are we that we need to be at war all the time? What is wrong with us?

It was spring and time for the troops to head off to war again. Ordinarily the king would be leading his soldiers but for some reason David stayed home this time. I know we like to think of little David, the little shepherd boy who defeated the great giant Goliath with the slingshot, but the truth is, David was a fierce warrior. My Old Testament professor in Div School says David was a thug. And if you really look at the stories about him and think about them in context you will see... David was a pretty messed up individual. In other words, he was very human. Messed up human... but human.

Anyways, one day David looks out and his eye catches sight of a beautiful woman. Bathsheba was her name. Wife of Uriah, one of David’s soldiers. She was one of the most beautiful women David had ever seen. He had to have her. So he sent his guards to get her and bring her to him. When she arrived, he slept with her. Got her pregnant. Turns out the bath she was taking was actually part of the purification ritual women had to go through after their menstrual cycle. In other words, she was

doing her proper duty as a faithful Jewish woman. And I'm willing to bet that David knew that's what the bath was. I wouldn't be surprised if spying on women in the bath wasn't something he did all the time when he was home. And as King, he could get any woman he wanted. And there was nothing they could do about it.

David thought he was slick. When he found out she was pregnant he sent her home and pulled her husband back from the war and sent him home. He figured Uriah would come home and sleep with his wife. That way he would think the baby was his and King David could get away with his crime. The perfect cover up. Which implies that David knew what he did was wrong. And it would've worked too except one thing, Uriah was a faithful and true man. David had him brought back to town but instead of going home to sleep with his wife, he stayed at the gate and slept on the ground. When asked why he said it was because he was a soldier. His fellow troops were out fighting. He felt it would be dishonorable for him to be resting in comfort, sleeping with his wife while his fellow troops were sleeping with each other and suffering in the field of battle. It wasn't fair. He didn't deserve that much grace. Yes, Uriah was an honorable man. And what did that creep David do? He set the poor man up to be killed. Sent Uriah back to the war and told his commanders to put him on the front line where he would surely be struck down in battle. And that's what happened.

Uriah was struck down.

They probably gave him a hero's burial. Then he took the beautiful Bathsheba and made her one of his wives where she eventually gave birth to a son.

And that's the story. Or at least the part we are dealing with today.

I read the story again and for the first time noticed that we never hear her voice. I started my sermon with what I imagine went through her mind, but we don't know what she thought. We don't know how she felt. But I think the text gives us hints.

Like the hint that her bath was the purification ritual after her period like a faithful Jew would do. Like the fact that she took the time to mourn her dead husband suggests that she loved him like he loved her. I bet if left to her own devices she would never have slept with David. She wasn't seeking fame or fortune. She didn't care that he was the king. She didn't flaunt herself at him. I know that's how the story is often told. But I don't believe it. Not anymore. No. All the sin in this lies on the head of David. And I think it is a shame for us to think any differently.

We don't hear her voice. But if we did I bet she would be saying "It's not my fault." She would be saying "I did not ask for this. Didn't want it." We never heard her when she told David no. I've always read this story in the traditional way... it's all about David. David had the power in this story and we always pay attention to the one with power. And that's messed up. Because look at what's happened. It's been a few thousand years later and we still haven't learned anything from this. A few thousand years later, and we still have women saying, me too.

God was not pleased with David's crime and sent the prophet Nathan to tell him about it. A dangerous mission because we all know that David can be a bit impulsive. No telling what he would do to someone pointing out his wrongs. But Nathan went after him. Set him up. Tricked him into condemning himself then flipped it on him. "I'm talking about you, dude! You're the one who committed the crime. You're the one who is wrong."

In the story David's eyes were opened. He saw his sin. The Psalm we read today is his apology to God for his sins. Never said whether or not he apologized to Bathsheba for his crime. Not sure it would've done any good. The story is all about David's repentance and God's mercy. And I'm sure David treated Bathsheba very

well after that. I'm sure she for the most part had a very comfortable life. But that damage is done. Those scars are always there.

I wish we had her voice in this story. I mean I don't want to take away from the traditional message we get from this story. King David messed up royally and God forgave him. The lesson we take from that is that God will forgive us when we mess up too. That's what God does. We mess up and God makes things right. That remains the take away from this story. Because despite David's sin, his line was blessed. It is through this line that we get to Jesus. Furthermore, because of this we get to hear Bathsheba's story. I'm sure she's not the first one to be assaulted like this and if you've been paying attention to the news you know she isn't the last. So yes, it is true, if we confess our sins and ask forgiveness, God will forgive us. God loves us so much that she will bless us despite ourselves.

So... if you are a victim – and I suspect that many of us are... whether we realize it or not – there is nothing about this that is your fault. You have done nothing wrong. Hold your head up high. Because this burden is not on you. It is not your fault. And I pray that you recognize that there are Nathan's out there who see you and hear you and believe you. And we will stand by you. We will speak truth to power and call down the judgment of God on those who abuse you. We stand with you and will hold you up when you need support. Continue to be faithful and know that God may not erase your pain, but trust God and they will fill you with blessings and provide for you a new path towards happiness if you so desire.

If you are a perpetrator – and I suspect that many of us are... whether we realize it or not – first thing... STOP. Don't do it anymore! Admit your guilt then throw yourself at God's feet and beg forgiveness. And then do right by your victim. I don't know what that means. I suspect it means something different in each situation. Do

the work and figure it out. And go on with your life knowing that if you do these things God will forgive you and provide for you a new path towards happiness if you so desire.

For the rest of us... we are just as guilty as David. There is the sin of commission and the sin of omission. What am I saying? We see what is happening. Most of us know what folks are doing. We need to make sure that there are no more Bathshebas. No more women taken against their will. No more men in power allowed to get away with the taking. We need more Nathan's – people of God willing to step to power and call them out for their wrong. And we need to make sure that EVERYONE's voice is heard. If they can't speak then we should speak for them. We should tell their stories for them. And we should demand their rights with them. We need to repent and throw ourselves at God's feet begging forgiveness for our sins. Then go on with our lives knowing that if we do these things God will forgive us and provide for us a new path towards happiness if we so desire.

Amen