

Pentecost 11, Year B
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King David was a successful, accomplished, deeply loved man. He had been chosen by God to move from being a young shepherd to becoming King. He had navigated the wrath of his predecessor and united the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah. He had recovered the Ark of the Covenant containing the Ten Commandments and brought it to the center of the kingdom. He had a palace full of wives, concubines, and children. God had even provided for a respite from the seemingly endless conflict in the region. It was spring, the usual time for armies to go forth and either fight against the attempts of neighboring armies to expand their territory or to try for some expansion of their own. Yet David chose to stay behind rather than lead the army as the king was expected to do. No explanation is given. We only know that since he was not where he was expected to be, he had free time, during which he admired the beauty of Bathsheba, a woman who likely presumed she had privacy while she bathed. David inquired as to her identity and was informed that she was the wife of one of his faithful soldiers. Her husband was away at battle, as David should have been. Knowing that, David decided that he would have her as his own. David learned soon after that Bathsheba was pregnant. To conceal the consequences of his behavior, David first tried bringing her husband home, hoping to create a plausible timeline for him to be the father.

When that did not work, David ordered Bathsheba's husband to be killed in battle, so Bathsheba could become his wife. Other than Bathsheba and her husband's commanding officer, neither of whom had the power to decline the king, David thought no one knew what he had done.

Someone knew. But how does one confront the king? How does one tell truth to power when the cost could be very high? Nathan the prophet came to David, not with an accusation, but a story. Stories can be wonderful ways to convey the truth because we can hear the story, recognize its truth, and open ourselves to the power of the story before we realize that it is about us. David heard the story, a story about a selfish man who had more riches than he needed, but not enough compassion to see beyond what he wanted. And because the behavior of the man in the story was so clearly wrong and so very hard hearted, David became very angry with the man. Then Nathan said, **"You are the man!"**

It would be easy to hear this story within a story as a clever way to help David see the truth of his own behavior and confront him with it, and stop there. But the point of the Bible telling *us* this story is not just to educate us about Nathan's cleverness, David's moment of insight, and the long term effects of his choices. It is so that we too can hear the story and find ourselves in it. Bible stories are rarely, if ever, only about some other person back then who has nothing to do with us. We listen to Nathan's story along with King David. And we must

ask ourselves, as we gauge our response to King David and hear the zinger from Nathan: Am I like that man? Have I found myself not doing what I was supposed to do, and doing what I was not supposed to do? Yes, I have. Have I envied what someone else had? Yes, I have. Have I lacked compassion and hurt someone else to get what I wanted? Yes, I have. Have there been consequences for my behavior that unintentionally hurt others around me? Yes, there have. I am more like that man than I would like to think.

How can we read this Bible story and come away with any hope? We can come away with hope for several reasons. First, Nathan confronts David so that he can face the truth and begin to deal with it. The thing is known. He cannot undo it. He can, however, confess it, take responsibility for it, and do what he can to make it right from here on. Psalm 51, which we read this morning, is attributed to David as he faced this particular realization of his sin. Whatever we've done is already known. The real question is how we're going to deal with it. We can change, with God's help.

Second, God forgives David. Yes, there are still consequences, but the relationship can begin from a new point of shared truth and openness. God remains faithful to the promise of David's heir one day building God a 'house.' David's son Solomon does build the famous Temple for God. And, if you look in the genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel according to Matthew, the very first verse

lists him as **“the son of David”**; so God also gives David a son whose kingship never ends.

Third, God uses all kinds of unexpected, flawed people to bring forth the Presence and work of God in the world. If you further peruse the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew, you find not only the men listed, but several surprising women: Rahab, a prostitute in Jericho who hid two spies from Israel; Ruth, a Moabite woman who was faithful in caring for her Israelite mother in law and to the memory of her Israelite husband; and Bathsheba, listed in the genealogy as **“the wife of Uriah”** so that we all remember this story about King David and know that good can be brought out of evil when God is involved. Evidently God wants us to be abundantly clear that God can work through anyone, anytime, anywhere. God can also bring new life out of death, whether it is through the birth of Solomon or the crucifixion of Jesus.

What we have done or failed to do is not the last word on what can happen. Thank God for that! That is exactly why our baptismal vows have built into them the question: **“Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?”** As I always like to point out, it says *whenever* we sin, not *if*. We will mess up, but that is not the end of the story. It is instead, by the grace of God, an opportunity to learn, and grow, and change. Rather than digging the hole deeper, piling on lies and cover ups and self-

deception, we can admit our mistakes and get back on the right path again. That gives me a lot of hope. And the reason this pattern of confessing, starting over, and having hope is possible is because of one thing and one thing only: the love of God. Yes, our mistakes, bad behavior, and reluctance to admit the truth are all real and need to be dealt with. But the good news, the really good news, is that God's love is bigger than any mistake, sin, brokenness, or evil we can come up with—and we humans have come up with some incredibly evil things. God came to us in Jesus, allowed himself to be tortured and killed, and then transformed our worst into God's best: new life in eternal connection with God through Jesus. And that new life is not just some nice Bible story. Like the story of King David it is meant for us to hear and find ourselves in, because this story is in the end about us, each and every one of us, and how God love us. That is the ultimate Good News.

Amen