

SERMON July 26, 2015
[2 Samuel 11:1-15; Psalm 14; Ephesians 3:14-21; John 6:1-21]
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PRAYER: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our strength, our courage, and our freedom. Amen

INTRODUCTION. The story we heard in the OT lesson this morning is a **lurid, chilling, tragic**, but absolutely **riveting** story of lust, murder, and **cover-up**. Read in the light of what is going on in our world today, we may be tempted to **dismiss** its importance for us by sagely observing, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." We could recount several similar stories from our own time. Or, we might say to ourselves, "Well, **I'm not** committing adultery and **I'm not** plotting someone's murder, so what does this story have to do with me?" If we say either of these things, we **may not hear** what the Spirit is saying to God's people!

It is **true** that this story is familiar to us because it **happens all the time**. But I hope to show that, despite the fact that we may **not** be guilty of **adultery** or **murder**, this story still has **great import** for us and is a word of warning to us in our circumstances now. Besides being a story of the sins of lust and murder, it is **also** a story about the **sin** of the **abuse of power**, abuse that results in the **destruction** of the innocent and powerless. This is a message we **all** need to hear. So, I am preaching to **myself** this morning, as much as to anyone else!

The story of David and Bathsheba is a familiar story to us. Perhaps you have even seen the famous **1951 movie** produced by Darryl Zanuck starring **Gregory Peck** as David and **Susan Hayward** as Bathsheba. You may recall the **riveting** scene where David stands on his balcony looking down to where Bathsheba had been bathing and, long after she has disappeared from sight, David stands there, gazing down, and you can see in his eyes the desire for Bathsheba **taking hold** of him. As he turns away, you **know** David has conceived a plan to **take her**!

What was to **prevent** him, the most powerful man in the land, from **taking** her to satisfy his lust, even when he finds out Bathsheba is the wife of one of his trusted military officers? So, we are told, **he took her!** David's **sordid** story is told in **emotionless**, terse terms: David **sent** for her; she **came** to him; he **lay** with her; she **returned** home. Notice that **David** is the **actor** in **control** of the situation and **Bathsheba** is his **passive victim**. In **her** culture, Bathsheba could **not** refuse her king anything. Somewhat later, Bathsheba sends David a message with just two words: *harah anoki*: "I am **pregnant!**" Undaunted by this **bombshell**, David conceives of **another plan** in his attempt to **control** the situation. He brought Bathsheba's **husband**, Uriah the Hittite, home from battle so that it would appear to everyone that **Uriah** was the **true** father of the child who was conceived. But, Uriah was a faithful warrior who **refused** to break the rules of purity that applied to a sanctified soldier during a holy war and he does **not go home** to sleep with Bathsheba. So, David comes up with still **another plan** in an attempt to **control** Uriah. He entertained Uriah until he was **drunk**, hoping to weaken his will. When this plan also failed, David contrived Uriah's murder in a manner that would put David, himself, beyond suspicion and, **then**, he could marry Bathsheba **just in time!** It seemed to be a **perfect crime!** "But", says the last verse in this chapter, "the thing that David had done **displeased** the Lord." David's **cover-up** may have deceived others, but David could not deceive Yahweh. And David is **no longer** in **control**.

In the following chapter in 2 Samuel, in one of the most dramatic encounters recorded in Scripture, the **prophet Nathan** appeared before David as the spokesman for Yahweh. Nathan gets David to **condemn himself** by telling him a story of a **poor man's** pet lamb that was stolen to provide meat for a **rich man's** table. David is **furious** at the rich man's **callous behavior** toward the poor man and he vows to put the rich man to death. Nathan points his finger at David and **exclaims**, "**You** are the **man!**" and that **strikes home** like a dagger to David's **guilty** heart. David responds to Nathan's accusation with true **remorse** and **penitence**: he **confesses**, "I have sinned against God". Hearing David's confession, Nathan says to him, "**Now** the Lord has put away your sin", which means God **forgave** David for what he had done. But not even David's **penitence**, nor God's **forgiveness**, could **free** David from the fateful **consequences** of

his actions. The **child** Bathsheba bore ultimately **died** and the **violence** David had visited on Bathsheba and Uriah ultimately **returned to haunt** David's own household, as we read in the rest of 2 Samuel.

“But the thing David had done displeased the Lord.” (2 Samuel 11:27) Why? Well, obviously, because David **brazenly** violated God's law by breaking **three** of the Ten Commandments! “You shall not covet your neighbor's' wife”; “You shall not commit adultery”; and “You shall not murder”. But, this story is **not simply a story of David's lust** and the consequences of yielding to lust, even though **it is that**. Even **worse** was David's shameless **abuse of his royal power**, which the **Lord** had **entrusted** to him to **shepherd** God's people. Earlier in 2 Samuel 5:2, we read that the Lord said to David, “It is **you** who shall be **shepherd of my people** Israel....” David started life as a shepherd **caaring** for his father's sheep; then, he was taken from that role as a boy shepherd to be the shepherd of **God's people** as the anointed king of Israel after Saul. As **king**, It was David's **responsibility**, under God, to **care** for God's people like a shepherd **cares** for his sheep. All through the OT, the **kings** and **leaders** of God's people are portrayed as **shepherds**. But, in the case of **Bathsheba**, whom David **took** and **raped**, and, in the case of **Uriah** the Hittite, whom David **had murdered** to cover up David's sin, David **abused the power** given to him by God and **abdicated** his responsibility to be a shepherd to God's people. He did **not take care** for God's sheep. And David's **abuse** of his power **displeased** the Lord.

Now, as Walter Bruggemann reminds us, “If we **face** this text at all, we are soon invited **behind** all the critical, scholarly questions to **face** the **harder** questions of **human desire** and **human power**—**desire** with all its **delight**, **power** with all its **potential for death**. This narrative is **more than we want to know** about **David** and **more than we can bear** to understand about **ourselves**. We might **wish** the story about David could be ‘**untold**’. [But] David's memory **cannot** be unwritten...any more that our **shared life** with David can be **undone**.” [Bruggemann, *2 Samuel*, p. 272] The one who wrote the psalm we sang this morning understood this: “**Everyone** has proved faithless; **all alike** have turned bad; there is none who does good; **no, not one**.” [Psalm 14:3]

Perhaps you do not need me to point out the **significance** of this story for what we may do today. The **abuse of power, taking advantage of others** in our relationships may not be one of the Ten Commandments. But, there are a thousand ways we can hurt and destroy another person short of **raping her** or **killing him**. How is it that **I, too**, like David, end up **abusing the power** I have been given or have earned? The abuse **begins** when I am **willfully blind** to my **own** capacity to do evil—to begin to think that the rules do **not necessarily** apply to **me**—to begin to think that I am in a **privileged position**, so that what I do will not have the same moral consequences that would be true for others. The **story of David**, who was the most powerful, the most privileged person in Israel—the one whom God had chosen to lead and shepherd God’s people—the story of David is a **powerful reminder** that the rules apply to **me, too**, and that my power can be used to hurt and destroy those around me, **even** those I hold **most dear**. As a white, straight, male, I am frequently reminded of the power I have to harm others.

There are **many ways** we can **abuse** our power and **take advantage** of others and you have already thought of some: **refusing to listen** to or credit someone who differs from us; **unwillingness to compromise** or negotiate—“my way, or the highway”; **ignoring** those who seem to be of little consequence to us; **marginalizing** or **demonizing** those who are different from us: gay people, straight people, persons of a different race or color, or with different theological views—it is amazing to me how frequently I hear Episcopalians diss Evangelicals!; **using** our **privileged position** in the **hierarchy** to serve our own ends or to abuse those who are lower down; insisting on being **right** *in a way* that requires those who **differ** from us being **wrong**; and I could go on.

What power or status do you and I enjoy in our **family** relationships, in our **workplaces**, in our various **communities**, in our community here at **St. Augustine’s**? How am I, how are you, using that power and status now?

Alas, it is **inevitable** that we **will abuse** whatever power we have—that is part of the human condition. Here, **too**, the story of David is a powerful reminder of **what we must**

do when we **do** do things that are **destructive** of our relationships with others. Like David we must **acknowledge** our abuse **publicly**; we must **confess** our sin against each other and against God. And, just as God did with David, God **puts away our sin**, God forgives us. That's the **good news!**

And that is what this **Eucharistic table** is all about this morning. As we come to this table, we publicly confess, with David, that we have sinned against God. We are come to receive God's forgiveness in the bread and wine made holy. May we arise in peace to go and sin no more. AMEN