

## **2 Samuel 11:1-15**

### **David and Bathsheba**

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman washing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, 'She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.' Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, 'I am pregnant.'

So David sent this word to Joab: 'Send me Uriah the Hittite.' And Joab sent him to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, 'Go down to your house and wash your feet.' So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.

David was told, 'Uriah did not go home.' So he asked Uriah, 'Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?'

Uriah said to David, 'The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!'

Then David said to him, 'Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back.' So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home.

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In it he wrote, 'Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so that he will be struck down and die.'

## **Mark 6:30-34, 53-end**

### **Jesus feeds the five thousand**

The apostles gathered round Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'

So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognised them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing those who were ill. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming towards him, he said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?' He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, 'It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!'

Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 'Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?'

Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, 'Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.' So they gathered them and filled

twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

### **Jesus walks on the water**

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. But he said to them, 'It is I; don't be afraid.' Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

## **Reflection**

When the Israelites first asked Samuel for a king, they insisted that they wanted to be like the other nations, with a king who would govern them and go off to war and fight for them. They believed that the answer to all their problems lay with a strong and valiant leader who would crush their enemies and let them get on with living a peaceful life. God, speaking through Samuel, warned his people that an earthly king would not act in their best interests: he would take the people and possessions that were most valuable to them and they would be trapped in a new form of slavery, but the people rejected the counsel of the one true king and demanded their own way.

David, chosen and anointed by God, seemed to tick all the right boxes. He was a brave warrior and ruler, whose defeat of the mighty Goliath was the first of many victories. Described as a 'man after God's own heart', he wasn't perfect - but up until the narrative we've read today, he was doing a fairly decent job of listening to God and leading his people. However, as God had foretold, things began to unravel. Here in chapter 11 we read that, safely ensconced in his Jerusalem palace, David appears to have shirked his responsibilities as king, sending his officers and fighting men out to war while he stays at home with his feet up – literally. What follows is a horrifying abuse of people and power, as the king commits a succession of sins that have far-reaching and tragic consequences.

Let's be careful not to simply read this as a man falling into temptation and then panicking and trying to cover it up. David's actions are calculated and callous; he shows no regard for Bathsheba or Uriah (who is portrayed as a loyal and honourable man) and has no issue with implicating others in his deceitful schemes.

If only we could say that misuse of privilege is a thing of the past, but we don't have to think very hard to recall recent examples of prominent leaders who have exploited and manipulated people and situations to satisfy their own needs and desires. Devastatingly, Christian leaders are not immune to this, and untold damage has been done to individuals, families, and whole communities because of the moral failings of some. However, before we get too self-righteous, let's remember Jesus' admonition to remove the plank in our own eye before we attend to the splinter in another's. Do we recognize the privileges that we ourselves have and, if we're in a position of leadership, whose interests are we serving? Are there ways that we objectify others or treat them as commodities to be used?

Thinking back to King David, how did a man that had such an intimate relationship with God, who trusted and depended on him completely and who acted with compassion and integrity towards others, end up disregarding God and causing so much harm? This is an uncomfortable story to grapple with, but let's not be afraid to sit with the discomfort for a bit and ask God to teach us through it. Let's consider whether we have Nathans in our lives who are ready to challenge us when we act in a way that doesn't honour God.

The lectionary reading stops before we see God confronting David with his evil behaviour and the repentance and forgiveness that then follows. Sin has wreaked havoc, but it doesn't have the final word - God's grace does. As John Peters says in the sermon podcast I've recommended this week, it's an outrageous, undeserved, ridiculous grace that stands there with wide open arms and says, 'I love you and I forgive you and here's a fresh start'. It's a grace that was paid for but is offered freely; we receive it by turning away from the sin that so easily entangles us, to the one true king - Jesus Christ.

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