

God's Game of Thrones *Lust-Betrayal-Murder 2* Samuel Rev. Brian

I have been watching the TV show *Wolf Hall* recently. It's an account of the career of Oliver Cromwell who serves as King Henry the 8^{th's} right hand man. So far we have seen 3 of Henry's six wives though he has only married two. Watching this retelling of another Game of Thrones reinforces the truth of King Solomon's wise saying: there is indeed "nothing new under the sun." Oh, there is new technology, but humans are not really any different. Witness this past week's hacking of the website that facilitates affairs among married people- Ashley Madison. No, humans have not changed much at all. And King David proves to us, that great people of faith, even great leaders, have feet of clay and are prone to doing terrible things.

So King David's armies are out in the time of battle. Back then they could not fight during planting or harvesting because soldiers had to assist with these. But David stays home and is getting a little fresh air up on the roof when he spies Bathsheba taking a bath. He sees what a beauty she is and has her summoned to his bed. Now in various interpretations of this story, Bathsheba is portrayed as knowing exactly what she is doing when she chooses to bathe in sight of the King. Oh, she is married to a high ranking soldier, but he's not the king. This is not entirely spelled out in scripture, but later Biblical accounts of Bathsheba shows she has a strong driving personality and she usually gets what she wants. But since we cannot know for sure about this, let us turn our focus back to David.

David, after finding out about Bathsheba is pregnant from their dalliance, brings Uriah, the Hittite, back from the front. By the way, Uriah reminds us that David's army is not made up of only people of Israel and Judah. Uriah is a Hittite, one of the peoples who often fought with Israel. Anyway, David, trying to cover up his affair with Bathsheba, brings Uriah home from the front and tries to compel him to sleep with his wife so that Uriah will think Bathsheba's child is his. But Uriah thwarts David, saying he

feels too guilty to have the comforts of home while his fellow soldiers are out in the field and he stays in King David's house. After hearing Uriah's reason for not going home to Bathsheba, David tries to get Uriah drunk enough that he will forget his resolve and go home. But this does not work, and curiously, Bathsheba is not mentioned in the plot and she never tries to compel Uriah to come home. David moves even deeper into the cover up game when he figures out a way to get rid of Uriah without it being obvious. David orders Uriah be murdered by abandonment on the battlefield. And David has the audacity to give Uriah himself the sealed order to deliver to Joab, leader of the army.

I am glad the lectionary schedule has us read this scripture because often we think of the great heroes of faith as being somehow different than us; somehow more holy or more righteous. But David's actions make it clear that he is fully human. So much so in fact, that if we would look at the 10 commandments, particularly if we were to put them to the 10 words that many theologians think compromise Moses' original tablets, we would find that David breaks every single one: "No coveting" or as the scripture puts it: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife" and servants and animals, etc... The first step down the road to disaster was looking upon the wife of Uriah and desiring her. Often we think Jesus was the first one to say intent is as important as action. Sin can be found not only in killing, Jesus teaches us but even in hating our neighbor – the emotion. But even in the 10 words, intent is held up as the roots of evil, as it becomes in this case.

"No adultery;" David and Bathsheba together break that one. And knowing that in that time wives were thought of as property, we realize too that David breaks the "No stealing" command when he takes Bathsheba, and he steals from Uriah a first-born child, an heir, a legacy. "No Lying" is the next commandment broken or again using the full text, "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." Technically this

commandment is for legal proceedings. It is not about lying to a neighbor, but given that David is King and he is trying to cover up his illegal and immoral actions certainly fit into this category. "No murder" the first two of the ten words is violated as well. Though David does not touch Uriah, but he premeditates plans and orders his death. I am not a lawyer, so I am not sure about the legal charge that could be leveled against David, but ethically and morally he is responsible for the death of Uriah.

What are we to do with this sordid tale? It gives us the opportunity to check our judgment at the door and embrace the understanding that we are all humans; that even the best of us have the potential to do horrible things. I myself have struggled with perfectionism in my life. Somehow I thought that if I did something wrong that meant I was a failure as a human. And so as part of my perfectionism I built up a false persona- a mask of sorts, of a person who was pious and always did the right thing. Well, guess what. I am not perfect... (Oh, I see some of you have talked to Judy) .. and that false persona hid the truth even from me - that I am human. That sometimes I do the wrong thing. There have been times I have awakened to weigh my actions and I have said, "How in the world did I end up here? How could I do that?" This story reminds me how... just like King David, just like the members of Ashley Madison, just like the people who scam Senior Citizens or misappropriate State funds to their friends, I pursued things I wanted without regard for how it affected others, even my family and friends... because that's what we humans do.

The idea that we all are human was reiterated yesterday when I had the privilege of attending the one woman play "The Amish Project." The show is amazing and powerful, but one line in particular struck me. Of the seven characters the actress portray, the wife of the man who murdered 10 young Amish girls said this about her husband, "He was not the devil, he just couldn't keep his darkness down anymore and it ate him. It ate him, and it ate those poor little girls and now it's eating me. And you can

pull your hat down and say that's evil, but the truth is that's all of us. That's the world. We are all just a few bad days away from 'sicko'. And that's not Satan that's the truth. It lives in me and, yes, it lives in you."

The honest understanding of our frailty and tendency to sin is the basis for understanding grace and forgiveness. And next week we will talk about that. But now I invite us to linger here with King David and Bathsheba, with army commander Joab—given an order to betray a friend and for Uriah, the one betrayed, because we have probably been in situations like all of them at different times in our lives. And remembering that will make us more grace-filled and forgiving; and more authentic people. If we are true in understanding who we are, and how much we can sin, then we will be able to love and forgive others and ourselves. AMEN

2 Samuel 11:1-15

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. 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. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. 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. 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. 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?" 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." 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, 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.

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. 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."