

Sermon: Pentecost 11

The Rev. Mike Wernick

August 5, 2018

Year B

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

Psalm 51:1-13

Ephesians 4:1-16

John 6:24-35

It's unheard of... for those looking for work... for those who write resumés... a tool intended to promote oneself... to include a thorough telling... of what they struggled with in their prior employment... or what they failed at... what they couldn't learn or master... what they disliked having to do... and may even have tried getting out of... it's unheard of... for those in a job interview to say why they disliked their former boss... why everything that went wrong was his or her fault... how they were like innocent Sisyphus... and their boss was like the guilty rock...

It's unheard of... it's mostly unheard of... for those... against whom whistles are blown... to seamlessly acknowledge the truth... of the claims... that are levied against them... it's unheard of... for them to acknowledge a narrative of selfish ambition... of being drunk with power... of twisting the truth... of minimizing or denying what almost everyone else can see... like the Emperor's new clothes... it's unheard of... for them to point fingers at themselves... instead of at others... it's almost unheard of...

And it's unheard of... it's almost unheard of... for the writers of history to malign themselves... to acknowledge their lust for power... or just... plain... lust... it's unheard of... for those about whom those histories are written... to hope that you know their deepest... darkest... secrets...

But that's just what the author of today's Jewish scripture wanted... because the author of 2 Samuel... wrote a story about men exerting their power... exercising their authority over women... wrote a story about adultery... and trying to cover that up... a story of conspiracy... and lies... David had Uriah carry his own death sentence... in a letter to Joab... and not just of Uriah... but all of the men he led... were killed...

And the author of 2 Samuel didn't just put this in some unread dime store novel... relegated to a dusty shelf... in a used book store... on a dead-end street... the author memorialized it in Jewish scripture... preserved the memory of it in Christianity's heritage... put it right out there for everyone to see... what David had done in secret... God would expose in daylight... and not only there but in the sight of the nation... and even after whistleblower Nathan named all of the wrongs that David had done... it was almost unheard of... David said... *I have sinned against the Lord...*

But God would not abandon David... there would be consequences... his child with Bathsheba would die... but God would not abandon David... trouble came from within David's own house... his son Amnon raped his daughter Tamar... his son Absalom killed Amnon in revenge... and later Absalom plotted to become King... but God would not abandon David... but would effect salvation through David's line... Jesus would be David's descendant...

Today's Psalm is labeled as... *A Psalm of David when the prophet Nathan came to him... after he had come to Bathsheba...* but Thomas Troeger... Professor of Christian Communication at Yale Divinity School... wrote... we now know that David did not compose this psalm... because its thought and language draw upon prophets who came centuries after David lived... Jeremiah... Third Isaiah... and Ezekiel... but the psalm provides a way of seeing how this story about David and Bathsheba... shaped the theological thinking of subsequent generations... it expands David's confession... and the author... both poet and theologian... takes us into the depths of what such a confession means... because the healing work of forgiveness and renewal involves nothing less than open-heart surgery... and the psalmist's awareness of how thoroughly infected his spiritual heart is... makes him open to God's creating a clean heart within him... here is a hymn... inspired by a confession... that was wrenched by a prophet... out of a king... who had abused his power... and by placing the memory of that story permanently into Israel's hymnbook... the psalmist alerts the community to be continually attentive to the misuse of power and the need to confess it... and to seek a

new heart... not just for individuals... but for the whole system of power relations which permits such abuse to occur... and it is in this and other psalms... and the stories which inspire them... that we find our identity...

And part of that identity is described in the Jewish scripture we could have read this morning... the complementary reading from Exodus... about the Israelites asking Moses if he had brought them into the wilderness to die... and about our need to rely on God to feed not only our bodies... but to feed us with living water... and the bread of life... and in today's reading from Ephesians... we are still being called to the arduous task of maturity... to embracing God's liberating action...

We heard last week... about how after feeding the 5,000... Jesus realized that the crowd was about to come and take him by force... to make him King... but their desire for his leadership did not extend beyond their desire for him to heal their illnesses... and satisfy their empty stomachs... perhaps they had become distracted... by the Bread and Circus that the Roman Empire offered... and thought that mattered... was being fed from the fleshpots of Egypt... as they had once been...

But bread was only a symbol of the gift Jesus offered... and the crowd had confused the symbol with the reality... the bread that God sent this time... was not a substance... but a person... embodying God's power to change... incarnating a way of being human... embodying a style of functioning that makes peace possible in the face of the apparent hopelessness of humanity's predicament...

Jesuit Michael Simone... who teaches scripture at Boston School of Theology and Ministry... wrote... throughout John's Gospel... Jesus' miracles are a means to an end... the crowd pursued him for his miraculous food... but this was not his true gift... and although his miracles alleviated the suffering of many... their purpose was to reveal the love he shared with the Father... and offered to his disciples... divine love was the "bread" that kept him going... and the food that would sustain his disciples for eternal

life... Jesus wanted disciples who pursued him for this gift... not for the symbols that only pointed to it...

The people who get hung up... get caught up... on the wealth they've amassed... or the power they lord over others... the people who get their sense of identity from the office they hold... instead of the holy work they can do through that office... the people whose vision stops at the symbol... and who fail to see the reality to which it points... diminish the value of the gifts God has given them...

Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. When we are One with Jesus... the way Jesus and God are One... we will transcend what Walter Brueggemann describes as the *Myth of Scarcity*... the fear that there's not enough to go around... we won't feel compelled to take the poor man's only lamb... so we can protect the many we have... and we will stop being afraid... because we too will be One with the Father...

And what's unfortunate... is that right now... we have all the resources and the technology we need... to grow enough food to feed the planet... to get our energy from wind and solar... to tackle vexing medical dis-eases and provide health care to everyone... to enact common sense gun laws and comprehensive immigration reform... right now...

We just need our own open-heart surgery so God can give us new hearts... so we can turn... *it's unheard of*... into... *I have sinned against God*... so we can to strive for justice and peace for all people... respect the dignity of every human being... and become the stewards of creation that God intended... and pray that God's will for us... becomes our will for us... and turn well-intentioned *thoughts and prayers*... into the action we need... Holy God... make it so...

Mike+