

## **“(n)ever enough”**

II Samuel 11; Eph. 3; John 6

Gordon Wiersma, 7/26/09

Eugene Peterson, a pastor and preacher and writer says this:

“Two names are unforgettably linked with David - people who are otherwise illiterate in the Scriptures know these names. One name is the giant Goliath; the other is the woman Bathsheba...Goliath – a fearsome giant; Bathsheba – a beautiful woman. Goliath, vicious tyrant; Bathsheba, an innocent victim. But different as Goliath and Bathsheba are...both bring David into a field of testing, a place of encounter that reveals David’s heart.”

This summer the lectionary is taking us through many of the stories of David – and Goliath and Bathsheba are the headliners – Goliath we heard about awhile ago when David was just starting out – it established him as a hero and rising star; Bathsheba happens much later with David as King – and this story is clearly a long ways from the territory of heroism and stardom. So what does this new territory reveal about David’s heart? And what might it tell us about our own hearts as well...? As I was thinking about the story this week, I wasn’t quite sure if what happens strikes us as surprising or not – or if you want to raise it up a notch, shocking or not. It’s partly the very familiarity of the story for many – we know how it goes, so it’s hard for it to be too surprising; but I was thinking too, that if this story is just about adultery – then it will not be too surprising or shocking to us. Maybe that sounds shocking to you in itself – ‘what? – that kind of behavior shouldn’t disturb us? – that’s not enough to be shocking?’ And of course that’s not what I’m saying – the sin and brokenness of what David does is clear – not simply the illicit sexual encounter but also how David abuses his power in it- Bathsheba has no choice in this – David is in control; but it’s not like this kind of thing is unknown or unheard of for us– we hear about and know it

happens all around us, with varying levels of consensual or power-driven dynamics going on – it is one of the sins that happens in a world full of sins - it is problem enough, but not shocking. So what I want to say about the story of David and Bathsheba is that the circumstances point to something more that is going on – or perhaps the circumstances in this story make more clear what is really going in most any situation.

Because what I HAVE found shocking in reflecting again on this story is trying to wrap my mind around just how illogical it is for David to do this. And what I mean by that is: David has EVERYTHING! David is the King – popular and secure; he is the most powerful man – he is the richest man in the nation – he has the most stuff, he has the most women (in that time women were pretty close to stuff), wives and concubines; and along with that David is seen as a good guy – a follower of God, a religious leader – David has it all. And what does David want? – he wants more – wants something else – wants a woman who is not his to have. David has it all, and wants more. Now again – maybe that is not shocking to you – you’ve seen that story plenty of times too. But I would like us to work at it being shocking – if we could just try and pretend that we came upon human culture without any prior experience, wouldn’t it seem reasonable that if we saw a person with lots of stuff, that you would think that would be enough? If you see someone who has everything, it makes no sense to want more – and yet David does - it is a stunning thing to behold.

Until we get to the heart of it: all of the stuff David has – all the power, all the things, all the pleasure – it is never enough to fill up his heart with what he truly needs. There is something empty in David – and none of those things can fill it. It is interesting that we call this the story of David and Bathsheba – what about David and Uriah? – Bathsheba’s husband who David murders through the guise of a battle. David had his way with Bathsheba and was going to just move

on; but everything unravels outwardly – Bathsheba pregnant; David unable to get Uriah together with Bathsheba; David ordering Uriah’s death – all ways of portraying the desperation and desolation and emptiness of David’s heart – an emptiness that spills out in deadly ways to everything around him. That’s about all I’m going to say about that story for now – because that’s where it leaves off in our reading today; there will be time for judgment and repentance and renewal – but for now it is just emptiness – emptiness inside of David and inflicted on everything he touches.

So how about another story? – the story of Jesus and the miracle of the feeding of the 5000. This is a much more G-rated story – a long way from adultery and murder – a feel-good story of a hungry crowd that Jesus feeds from the seed of one shared lunch; a few loaves and fishes multiplied into a feast for many. Here it is not one person with everything grabbing for more - here it is one offering what he has for others – here it is people in need of a meal being filled, and Jesus does so in an extraordinary way. So what trouble could we have with a great story like that?! Well, I read a wonderful commentator who gives us a hint - the trouble with miracles is that while they used to be stories that validated and nurtured belief: ‘Jesus did miracles, therefore he was divine, so I believe in him’; there is a modern trend instead for any talk of miracles to actually repel belief: ‘miracles don’t make sense, therefore I’m not sure the Bible makes sense, so I don’t believe.’ It is quite a turn of events – the stories the church has told to inspire belief become the stories used to reject it. It becomes, or is posed as, a matter of faith vs. science, or belief vs. logic, or even fiction vs. facts. Or there are creative alternatives given: that this story is really about the miracle of generosity – that people were inspired to share the food they’d been hiding, so then there was more than enough for all. Well that would be a nice story – but it’s

clearly not the story witnessed to here – not the miracle story that the church saw as pointing to the truth of who Jesus was.

We are given the witness of Jesus providing something to this crowd that had its start in what was present, but was made abundant out of Jesus' own person/presence/power. And the thing about miracles is they are always signs pointing to something else...they are never an isolated event simply meant to amaze or impress – they are signs – that's literally how the Gospel of John speaks of miracles – calls them signs. Miracles are signs that use a particular event to point to a broader truth – it was never the case that all people around Jesus were healed, or that food was never needed because Jesus was always multiplying it – or even that Jesus never rode in a boat, preferring always to walk on water! No, the specific events pointed to the broader truth that the power and person of God were always present in Jesus, and that through him people were brought into a relationship with that power and presence – with God. In this situation Jesus provides food – and that is good; but as we'll hear in the coming weeks in John, it points much more broadly to Jesus providing life.

Is it too far-fetched then, do you think - to compare and contrast these stories – David/Bathsheba and Jesus feeding the 5000? It had never occurred to me to do so before – but now it seems quite clear: David having so much, but never enough - his own emptiness destroying the lives around him; the crowds without enough, and Jesus filling that need – pointing to a fullness of life itself as he does so. Abundance – scarcity; scarcity – abundance....that's what's going on in these stories – and I think it is the words we heard in Ephesians that can make that all clear for us.

What Paul is writing about in Ephesians – what he is so happy about that he is on his knees in thanks to God for – is that through Jesus Christ, God's saving grace is now made known to, given to all people – not just the Jews, but

the Gentiles too. Does that seem like a big deal to you? It's hard for us today to feel that - to realize how radical that was - since we are the Gentiles who have had this Gospel for awhile now. But what I want us to notice is that Paul is rejoicing in this as a Jew – as one who was already in the 'in' group – and he reacts to the including of others with joy. That is not always the case – often not the case – that the group who already has something is glad to include others in it. And I would say that what this inclusion of Jews and Gentiles together does, significant as it is in itself, is point to something even deeper – it is like a miracle in that way: it points beyond itself, revealing the only way that life for any of us, for all of us, is full, rather than empty.

I do not think it is too much to say that the many divisions present in life and the many actions that inflict violence and brokenness on life have to do with what we have or not – it is people trying to get something they think will make life good; people trying to protect what they do have - trying to prevent others from getting something; people trying to exclude others from their status – social, religious, political. It can be about sex and murder, about hunger and food, even about health care and race, about religion and politics – but the bottom line is people pursuing something or holding onto something for me/us at the diminishment of another person's life.

And in the midst of that, Ephesians gives us a word that is remarkable and beautiful, deeply challenging and wise – it is a 'come to Jesus' moment that confronts us with what life is really about. Listen to the phrases Paul uses – 'the riches of God's glory' ... 'your being strengthened by the Spirit' ... 'Christ dwelling in your heart' ... 'rooted and grounded in a love that is infinite - knowing a love that surpasses knowledge', which is quite a turn of phrase. And where does that all lead? – 'so that you may be filled with the fullness of God.' That is the only substance to life that lasts – it is the only filling for which we were truly created:

a deep filling to our emptiness found through the grace and love of Christ in our hearts – that is the very presence of Christ in us; and what that very personal reality leads to is the abundance of God working through us for all: ‘God’s power able to accomplish far more abundantly than all we can ask or imagine’ it says. ‘...filled with the fullness of God...’ ...my fullness filling others.

Here’s what I want to say – here is what I believe the Spirit of Christ speaks to us and gives us the faith to hear: in this world, in our lives, we are bombarded with the falsehood, the lie, that we need to fill our lives with certain things and that we need to protect what we have from others – it is a very physical, material message that saturates our lives in ways big and small, individual and communal – that impacts our relationships and bodies, our politics and economies, our religion and culture. It is a message of emptiness and scarcity that does violence within us and to those around us and to the creation in which we live - it is the genesis of everyday sins and global conflicts. Sisters and brothers - don’t believe it – don’t buy it (some pun intended) – don’t accept the emptiness that such false abundance endlessly perpetuates. What we believe and know and feel and live is this truth: our lives are filled only by the fullness of God – a miraculous love and grace that as it fills us, makes for an abundance that can fill all – with bread and with life. It is a truth that judges us – that claims us – that saves us – that frees us – a truth that calls us with joy and hope to confront the emptiness within us and around us with true abundance for body and soul: *Now to God who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,<sup>21</sup> to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. AMEN*