

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost - Elizabeth de la Garza-Ahern

2 Samuel 11:1-15; Psalm 14; Ephesians 3:14-21; John 6:1-21

“Dear Diary, in half an hour I will go to meet the king of Israel. I am excited and a bit scared to go to the palace, but I am not sure why I have been summoned. Perhaps there is news about my beloved husband, who has been away for weeks at war. I do pray to the Lord Most High that all is well with him. He is such an honorable man and serves our country and our king with all his might. Our wedding, earlier this spring, was everything I had dreamed—it is just too bad that he had to leave me here in Jerusalem with my relatives while he is away.

“Perhaps there is news about my father, who used to serve in the king's guard. Now that he is older, he travels to the neighboring nations to represent Israel's interests. But if it was news about my father, why wasn't my brother summoned instead of me? I am just a seventeen-year-old woman. My parents are highly honorable people in our community and have high expectations for my siblings and me. Yes, I am reminded that my name, Bathsheba, means ‘Daughter of Oath,’ because of the solemn promise to God that my parents made to serve and support our new nation, Israel, and our king.

“Perhaps the royal family has heard about the fine linen I have been producing and wants to buy it from me. That would be fantastic! That way my husband and I would be able to afford our own place much more quickly. I will take a few samples to show them, just in case. It would be so convenient to have these amazing customers just around the block. Well, I'd better go now, as it's almost time ...”

My assumption is that all of you have heard the David and Bathsheba story before. It is a well-known story. There are even Hollywood versions. One has to wonder, why is this story in the Bible, considering how it makes David—‘a man after God's own heart’—look so bad? I tend to believe that it is here to teach us how even someone as devoted as David can act so selfishly—and how we, who love God, love ourselves even more. Because we love ourselves even more than we love God, we also have the propensity to act so intensely foolish, to the point of betraying our own community—those who serve us and those whom we serve.

As we read, we realize that there are many questions that this text raises. We know that David is Israel's second king, he is probably about 50 years old at this time, has been married to several women and has many children already. The palace was moved from Hebron to Jerusalem and has been there for about ten years. We do not know how old Bathsheba is, but because women were given into marriage at a young age and no children are mentioned, we can assume that she was young and probably a newlywed.

Let's look at the text again: 2nd Samuel 11:1-15.

11:1 *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 win some battles.) But David remained at Jerusalem.* Right here the text is alerting us that something is different. David is not with his troops as he should be. Is he sick? Is he avoiding his duties?

11:2 *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.* The king's house is no Buckingham Palace. He is able to see into someone else's courtyard from the roof (which indicates close proximity). The text says that Bathsheba was beautiful. The assumption is that she was also naked, but the Bible does not say that. Regardless of your standard of beauty, we all know beauty when we see it—it does not have to be exposed/naked to be noticed.

11:3 *David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite."* Does he know who she is? It appears that Bathsheba's father, grandfather and husband were all part of David's inner circle.

11:4 *So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.)* (This is probably here to let us know that she was not pregnant at the time. She was most likely following the Levitical rules of purification, which made women with any flow of blood unclean; anything that they touched or anyone who touched them was also unclean for seven days after the flow had stopped. In a biological sense, this also means ovulation time. ☺) *Then she returned to her house.*

So David summons her and she comes and they sleep together. Most of the commentaries I read said that Bathsheba did not protest, that she was a willing participant in this affair. Perhaps it makes our hero, David, look better if we think that it was consensual. What was a young girl to do? If the king sent soldiers to your house, what would you do? Was this abuse of power? Did she have a choice? Was this rape? Does David care that he is making her adulterous? Some think that she timed it all so that she would be noticed. It is true that a few beautiful people may be attention seekers, but beautiful people already get a lot of attention—often unwanted. Since the Bible does not speak of her motive and she is given no voice, I think that she was just an innocent victim. It is not her fault that she is beautiful and that her neighbor is prying into her affairs.

11:5-8 *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.* So Bathsheba gets pregnant, and Uriah is asked to take leave from the battlefield so that Uriah will go to sleep with his wife and make it look like the baby is his. David encourages this emphatically by telling Uriah to 'wash his feet,' which was a euphemism for the genitals. David also sent a gift, which was food from the king's house that he wants for Uriah to enjoy with his wife.

11:9-11 *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."* Wow! Uriah does not make it easy for David. Although not an Israelite, he had adopted their faith. By the way, his name

means “My light is the Lord.” Uriah appears to be a righteous man, and his fidelity and loyalty stand in contrast to David’s.

Then, in the following verses, David asks Uriah to stay and gets him drunk, but even then Uriah does not go to his house. Many have speculated about why he would not want to go home—thereby rejecting his wife—but the text does not tell us about other motives. Under the Holy War convention, though, soldiers were prohibited from having intercourse. If they did, either God or the other soldiers would kill them for breaking the oath.

11:14-15 *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 and die.”* This part gives me chills! Did Uriah know what was written in the letter he was carrying? People say that adultery is never really totally secret. Just think about the messengers and others involved here. Did Uriah know what had happened to his wife? Did the other soldiers noticed something different about their fighting strategy? Some are always too smart and discerning to be deceived.

It is clear that David has broken four of the Commandments: first he coveted Bathsheba, then he committed adultery with her, then he lied in the process of covering the affair and the resulting pregnancy, and then he murdered Uriah. As much as we want David to be the good guy, we must wonder: what else did he do? Did he seduce and rape Bathsheba? In the process, he made others—like Joab—accomplices to murder. He sinned against Bathsheba and her family and against his own household. He betrayed his community, those who had put their trust in him to rule with justice, and he demoralized people and possibly his army because of his selfishness and poor leadership.

This text is so rich and it raises so many questions. The way we answer the questions may tell us something about our values and ourselves.

When my daughter, Aly, was about four years old her Sunday School teacher reprimanded her and she felt that it was unjustified. She told me emphatically, and with conviction, “If she thinks she is the boss of the world, God is not going to like it.” David is king of Israel, but he is not the boss of the world and indeed God is not going to like David’s actions. Later on we will see the significant implications and how David’s family is personally affected by his sin, his injustice and his betrayal of his community.

In the Gospel of John, we have Jesus taking bread, giving thanks, and multiplying to feed a group of five thousand. This multitude has experienced a miracle together as they have communion with Jesus. They are not only satisfied, but also excited. They recognize this miracle and want to make Jesus king, but Jesus, who is more in love with God than with himself, leaves and goes to be alone on a mountain—perhaps because He knows the human condition. He knows that what we need is a Savior, not another earthly king.

The generosity of God is so vast! His love is so deep that we are invited to sit at the Table with Jesus and commune with him and our fellow human beings. Then, we have intercessors so that God, who is able to do immensely *more than all we can ask or imagine*, liberates us from

temptation and sin. Pray that we use the gifts He gives us to edify our community, not to use it and abuse it for our own sake and pleasure.