



## SUNDAY SERMON

# Secrets Hidden in Plain Sight

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A ruler whose power has gone to his head, whose appetites have run amok; sees, grabs, takes what he wants; manipulates the facts; sacrifices his own loyal aides; and abuses women with utter disregard. Lord, oh lord, is there nothing new under the sun?

King David was the bright-eyed, golden-haired wonder; chosen, anointed by God; who slayed Goliath, led his people with wisdom; a poet and musician; the author – so it is said – of most of our psalms; the first of a great lineage of kings. Yet, here he is a complete moral disaster.

For those who do not recall, the abbreviated version goes like this: Israel is warring with its neighbors. King David, older and established, stays home at the palace and spies a beautiful woman bathing on her rooftop. When he asks, the king is informed that this is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of David's most loyal generals. Thus, he knew who – and whose – she was. Yet knew only his own desire.

David acts swiftly. The verbs of the text rush as the passion of David rushed. He sent for; he took; he lay with this woman. The royal deed of self-indulgence does not take long. Only afterward, the woman gets some verbs: she returned; she conceived. There is no conversation, no hint of care, only lust. The verb we are invited to hear resonate is "he took" – repeated, he took, took, took! The one to whom all and more had been given, just took what he wanted. At the height of his power and independence.

Then Bathsheba speaks for the first time: "I am pregnant."

David's control is gone. It is out of his hands; that which is done cannot be undone. But David makes arrangements, issues an order, quote: "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die." The king's order is executed. Then, relief. The truth has been concealed. The guilt eased. The monarchy saved.

Enter Nathan the prophet in our text this morning. Not an enviable task, to be the messenger sent to convict another of wrong-doing, especially when the one to whom you are sent is king, surrounded by aides.

Clever Nathan tells a parable. About two men: one rich, one poor. The rich man had everything. The poor man had one precious ewe lamb, whom he treasured and cared for. The rich man wanted lunch. Not wanting to kill his own sheep, he took – note the verb! – the poor man's lamb and ate it for lunch.

The parable does its powerful work. "That man should die!" exclaims David. Said Nathan to David, "You are that man." The weight of self-conviction is crushing and absolute. Nathan recalls all that God has done. David's sin has been his (ill-) perceived autonomy. This moment is second only to that in the Garden of Eden,

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### DATE

Tenth Sunday after  
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### PREACHER

The Rev. Ledlie Laughlin

### VERSES

II Samuel 11 & 12

as the end of innocence. It is a man's coming of age, a reckoning. It is one individual awakening to see and know the weight of what it is to betray and hurt another human being. The sin is committed as a specific act, but the weight of the sin – and of all sin – is that it ruptures the relationship with another, and with God.

Says David, "I have sinned against the Lord." That is all he says. The acknowledgment serves as confession. For Nathan declares: "The Lord has put away your sin."

David's confession is the hinge between death and life. The Lord forgives; David shall live. But not without price; he will no longer live as one impervious to the needs of others. He will live as all men and women who come to full maturity must one day acknowledge and live – as one fallen and forgiven. The fruit of his adultery with Bathsheba, a son, shall die. Their second son, Solomon, will become a great, but corrupt king. David will never be the same. Innocence and unhindered choice are no longer his. God's favor no longer rests upon him.

There is not much to celebrate about David in this story. But the narrator invites us to notice: first, that David exercises considerable moral courage in facing up to his own actions. Second, though late, it is not too late – for him – for repentance – and forgiveness.

To confess our sin is a theological and moral accomplishment. To confess our sin involves coming to a new understanding of our relationship with God and one another. We may take it for granted that once David is convicted by Nathan's story, he will confess his guilt. That is not so. Oft-times, we do not. We perpetuate the lies. David might simply have done away with Nathan as he did with Uriah, as we are tempted to do with those who hold up a mirror to our shortcomings. Or he might have arrogantly, blindly denied that these particular rules applied to him, as an alcoholic may continue to consume and deny, spinning the web of his or her own demise.

The focus of the text is on David, but he deserves no heroic glow. His behavior was reprehensible, and his life ultimately tragic. And Bathsheba? She will go on to create what appears to be a good life, as the queen mother of King Solomon – a credit to her extraordinary resilience. But of her being raped by David, of her grief over the murder of her husband Uriah, the loss of her first child, the text is mute, complicit, enforcing upon her an eternal silence.

By all accounts, David had been a good man, even a great human being. But here he is, broken. Sin, is not a matter of inherent depravity, or some innate, original evil.

St. Augustine spoke of sin as disordered love. We sin when we have our loves out of order. We love a lot of things. We love family, we love affection, we love money, status, truth. We all know that some loves are higher – that our love of family is higher than our love of money. However, when those ranks begin to shift, that's when sin comes in. Our love of truth should be higher than our love of money. But if we're lying to get money, we're putting our loves out of order. In his book, *Road to Character*, David Brooks posits, "if a friend tells you a secret and you blab it at a dinner party, you're putting your love of popularity above your love of friendship. And we know that's wrong. That's the wrong order."

I wonder why these stories about David and Bathsheba survived intact. If you were the editor compiling tales of the great King David, wouldn't you just omit this one? It's remarkable, too, that those who created our lectionary include these stories. There are lots of texts we never read – at least not a Sunday morning. What do we learn of God? Of God's participation in our lives?

God was not mentioned while David was taking, scheming, and manipulating, but the text says – with searing simplicity – "the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." "And the Lord sent Nathan to David."

God sent Nathan so the truth would be laid bare, so the hidden lies, the secrets, and deceptions, would be exposed. Our secrets are not secret from God. For God the dark and the light are both alike. Maybe this is why those ancient editors kept this story in our scripture, and more recent theologians included it for this

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Sunday: because all of us get our loves out of order. We do. And the first step to reordering those loves, right ordering those loves, is to lay our stories bare – to quit keeping secrets and tell the truth to those who need and deserve to hear it.

I am wondering if you have hidden secrets, smoldering in shame, weighing heavy upon you. Secrets, from God, are hidden in plain sight. Truth is the hinge between death and life; choose life, the life God offers to you and to all. Amen.