

Nathan's Rebuke
2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a
Colebrook Congregational Church
Ordinary 19 / August 9, 2015

My best friend at Divinity School, Juliet, loved having guinea pigs as pets. She named the one she had while at Yale “Pseudepigrapha,” after the collection of apocryphal Jewish stories...the ones Hollywood uses whenever they go on about angels. Anyway, every day I had to hear about little Pseude. And if it she had just eaten, I had to hear about what a greedy little pig she was with lettuce.

Today's scripture is about greed. But first, some background.

After the Exodus and the settlement in the Holy Land, the Israelites organized themselves into a confederation of tribes. Eleven tribes formed their own states, essentially, with the twelfth tribe, Levi, serving as the priests, who were forbidden from owning land due to their religious role in society. There was no central leader in those times. Instead there were Judges, who were charismatic military, political, and judicial leaders that everyone agreed to follow for a set period of time to address a certain crisis. The Book of Judges is about most of them, and included familiar people like: Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson. There is also Joshua, the one who beseiged the city of Jericho, and then Eli and Samuel, which the hymn, Here I Am Lord, is based upon.

The Books of Samuel are set between the time of that loose confederation of tribes led by temporary judges, and the monarchy, telling the story of that transition. An interesting thing about the Books of Samuel's text is that there does not exist a complete version of it in the original Hebrew. What we have is combination of what exists from the original Hebrew, the Greek version called the Septuagint, and even parts of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Problem is, there are lots of discrepancies, which are noted in the footnotes of the NRSV in the pews.

Samuel was the last Judge of Israel. During his time, the people of Israel had called out to YHWH to provide them with a king, which Samuel and YHWH argued was unnecessary, but the people insisted, and YHWH could not ignore

their pleas. The theme of Samuel is in fact an evaluation of monarchs and dynastic rule, that they could be a blessing if they remain faithful, but can be a curse leading to destruction, not just of themselves, but of the entire kingdom.

So, Saul was chosen to lead, and was anointed by Samuel, but it turned out that Saul was not worthy, and Samuel was directed to find David; the defeater of Goliath, and ancestor of Jesus; and bring him to be Saul's armor-bearer and harpist, and is anointed as Saul's heir, and after Saul's premature death is lifted up as an example of a good king.

But no one is perfect. King David also sinned and brought destruction upon his house with his actions concerning Uriah and Bathsheba. The text is careful to say that this one time David was bad, but the rest about him, that is unrelated to this incident, was good.

What happened just prior to today's selection is that King David is walking about the palace and happens to see General Uriah's wife bathing on the roof of their house. David is smitten with Bathsheba, and even though God had provided him with a kingship, wives, and many honors, he arranges that in the next battle, Uriah would be unsupported so that he would be killed, and David would be free to take Bathsheba as an additional wife as well.

This is where the story picks up. David has taken Bathsheba and produced a son. And then the prophet Nathan approached David on a day where David was sitting as a judge, settling legal issues that anyone could bring for a decision by him. Nathan had a parable for the misbehaved king.

There were two men who lived in a city. A rich man with many herds of livestock, and a poor man with only a single lamb. Hospitality was very important back then, so when a traveler visited the rich man, he had to set out a feast. But instead of using one of his many animals, he takes the only one from the poor man to prepare it for the traveler.

David was angered and passed judgment against the rich man, in effect also passing judgment against himself, because what he did with Uriah was the

same sort of thing that the rich man did to the poor man. Nathan tells him that and reminds him of all that God has done for him. The anointment that denotes leadership, being kept him safe from Saul, the kingship of Israel symbolized by the physical palace and the previous king's harem, all of that, God gave him, and would have given him more if he had only asked.

God's judgment against David is that trouble will rise in his own house. Trouble of the sword. Civil war followed with his sons. The judgments about the wives is a euphemism about a change in leadership. When someone succeeded a king, either naturally or brutally, he would take over the harem, which was seen as legitimizing and proclaiming the rule of the new king. So saying that his wives will be given to his neighbors in sight of the sun, means that someone will seize power very publicly.

Lastly, David acknowledged his sin. The rest of Samuel tells the story of the repercussions of David's greed.

We all know greed when we see it, but I figured that I should look up the definition of greed if I was going to talk about it. The first part of the definition was about the desire to possess items of real or abstract value that are unnecessary to basic survival and comfort. I read that and immediately thought about my collections. My collection of Boy Scout Council Shoulder Patches are definitely not necessary to basic survival and comfort. I could make an argument that my books bring basic comfort. how many of us collect things? I was shocked, worried about what this meant about how I have lived, but then I read the rest of the definition. An inordinate desire to possess more than one needs, where there is an inability to control the differentiation of wants versus needs.

I enjoy the stories of the Three Musketeers, and I own several versions of the adaptations of Alexandre Dumas' epic series. The last novel was called the Vicomte de Bragelonne, which was made into a movie in 1998 called, The Man in the Iron Mask. As usual, the movie does not faithfully follow the novel. One plot point was changed, which rather closely resembles this story from Samuel.

The story is set decades after the Three Musketeers, and Athos has a son, Raoul, who has fallen in love with a woman named Christine. Raoul was about to be discharged from the army and given a commission in the Musketeers, like his father before him, and was also about to propose to Christine. However, King Louis XIV had caught sight of Christine and was smitten like how David was. He arranged for Raoul to be recalled to the army and sent to the front where the fighting was heaviest, just like what David did to Uriah. Raoul realizes what has happened and still goes, because as he says, he is not a coward like the king. He also decided not to propose to Christine, so not to make her a wife and a widow at the same moment.

D'Artagnan is like Nathan. He went to the king and begged him to reconsider his orders about Raoul. He could have any woman in France, why did he need Christine? He would only discard her once he grew bored with her, and is that worth taking the life of the son of a man who had faithfully served the royal family for many decades? Unfortunately, the King was not like David, who recognized his sin, and selfishly continued with his scheme of greed.

I don't like greed. I don't understand greed. I avoid being around those who are greedy. So this past week, I have had difficulty coming up with personal illustrations. The closest I came was as a student, Juliet and I would abuse any free food opportunities. We certainly did not need as much as we took. So, I asked friends and colleagues about greed. A friend from college told me about how when A&P was about to go under, the top executives gave themselves bonuses, and then gave thousands of employees pink slips.

A friend from Barnes & Noble replied to my post on Facebook with just one word. And when I saw that, I knew that was it. Especially at this time of year at the bookstore. That word was "Educators." What she was referring to was those educators who have our educator discount card and use it to make obviously personal purchases with it.

There are different kinds of discount cards at Barnes & Noble. Memberships that cost a yearly fee and come with many benefits. A quick side note, if you do not have a membership, and you find yourself at a Barnes & Noble, and you want a discount or place an order with free shipping, please feel free to

use mine! Use my phone number that is printed on the back of the bulletin when you get to the register. There are institutional and business accounts, streamlining tax exemptions, bulk rates, and other discounts for schools, churches, libraries, mechanic shops, business seminars. Then there is the Educator card. A free discount card intended for teachers to use when they have to use their own money for classroom resources, the kind of things one would take tax deductions on. We ask them if the items are to be used in their classroom. The honest ones would then separate their orders into classroom and personal. Many of my colleagues, disgusted by the dishonest ones, would say to the honest ones, thank you for your honesty, and we'll just ring this all together for you so we can move the line along quicker. We reward them for their honesty. Many of them would look us straight in the eye and say yes, the whole order was to be used in their classroom, and we cannot argue with them...unless they are buying romance novels. When 50 Shades of Grey came out, I had teachers trying to use their Educator Cards on it. Then they got really nasty when they were turned away. Most are buying books that while not romance, but were not the sort of novels that one would find taught in school. Clive Cussler is no Ernest Hemingway, for example. Or expensive LEGO sets with their children next to them all excited about their new toy. Others would then ask for gift receipts. It's so obvious that they are not buying stuff for their classroom. I had one educator a couple weeks ago come up with a bunch of magazines and movies, items that are not discounted with that card. Another in the same week tried to use coupons on top of the educator discount, which is something only allowed by the paying members. They both got so upset with me, berating a retail worker who could not respond, over something the computer does automatically, while they violated the rules of a courtesy that they did not even have to pay for. That scene is something that every cashier has gone through very often, almost daily when school is on break or about to restart.

It is extremely hard to say this as a former educator, I believe that some teachers, especially kindergarten & first grade, deserve combat pay. I believe that teachers need our support to help educate the future generations, but while we have various types of rude customers, the nastiest and greediest ones, have been those abusing their Educator Cards. They have been given a free discount to use on stuff they need for their vocation, but some use it on

their wants, and aren't even nice about it.

Greed can happen in many different ways and to different degrees. Greed leads to destruction of the self or others. We must be vigilant of ourselves, to make sure that we are not greedy, obtaining only what we need, balancing our needs and wants properly. Remember Nathan's rebuke of King David: When you are blessed with plenty, be happy with what you have, not what others have.

Amen

Pastoral Prayer

[PAUSE]

O God, we hold up the needs of our neighbors as dear to us as our own needs. Loving our neighbors as ourselves, we offer to You our thanksgivings and our petitions on behalf of our church, our community, and the world.

We thank You for Your blessings, and for the lessons You teach us. We thank You for those You have sent to help us in our daily lives. And we thank You for the opportunities to serve You through serving others, seeing to their needs.

We pray for the forgiveness of our missteps. We pray for your guidance to live our lives in more loving ways.

We pray for those who are unwell of mind, of body, or of spirit. We pray for their recovery, we pray for their caregivers, and we pray that you move us to help them in any way our gifts allow. We pray for those who are lost, so that they may find guidance. We pray for those who protect us, please keep them safe as they have kept us safe. And we pray that you help us to be instruments of your divine love.

We especially pray for:

Hear our prayers, O God, and through the ministry of your Son, free us from the grip of distraction, that we may be of service to others in your name in our lives and proclaiming your saving deeds to all the world. Amen.

2 Samuel 11:26 - 12:13a

11:26 When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him.

11:27 When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD,

12:1 and the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor.

12:2 The rich man had very many flocks and herds;

12:3 but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him.

12:4 Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him."

12:5 Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die;

12:6 he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

12:7 Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul;

12:8 I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been

too little, I would have added as much more.

12:9 Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

12:10 Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.

12:11 Thus says the LORD: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun.

12:12 For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun."

12:13a David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."