

God's Game of Thrones *Rich Man; Poor Man 2* Samuel 11:26-12:13a Rev. B

This week we learn several things about kings, prophets and God. First, we see that David's plan has been completed; Uriah is dead and Bathsheba is now his wife. And then the prophet Nathan comes to see David to deliver a message to the King from God. The mode Nathan uses is a story. A simple story of injustice that helps David see what he has done. Drama has always been a tool of the Prophets. They tell stories in different ways. One creates a pottery model of Jerusalem that he destroys at God's command to show that judgment is coming; another marries a prostitute to reveal to the people just how they are behaving toward God - Israel's husband in that prophets understanding. Jesus too picks up this tool of story-telling in his many parables. Sometimes the stories or actions are more complicated or confusing, but most of the time their message is as clear as Nathan's story.

One of the reasons stories are so powerful is they get us out of our own heads. It is important in our spiritual lives to sometimes break the momentum – the daily rhythm that can lure us into thinking that our patterned lives are reality in its fullness. That is what we hope happens here in worship during a song we sing, or a scripture we hear – an awakening, an a-ha, a revelation of ways we can live more faithfully or draw closer to God. David, like all of us, is putting one foot in front of the other in this time. And in the panic and scheming around his affair with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, he is caught up in his own thinking. And so Nathan creates the story of the rich man and the poor man. All the political subtleties and self-justifications of David's actions are wiped away when the bare facts of his actions are reflected back to him in the parable.

This reflects the importance for all leaders to have someone on the outside – someone with a different viewpoint to occasionally help them see. Thank God David knows Nathan is God's messenger – an assurance that God will remind David when he has gone astray. Not all kings or leaders allow the voice of the other to be heard. Some

leaders surround themselves with minions which the dictionary says are “servile or slavish followers of somebody important.” And other Kings kill or banish God’s messengers, but David actually listens to Nathan and lets the message sink in.

The ability to take in such a difficult message is not easy. I was reminded of that this week when I found out I have been spreading something untrue through a sermon I gave a few weeks ago. I talked about the Governor’s veto of the funding for the Veterans program at Manasota Goodwill and I emphasized how terrible this was when compared to the money sent to the IMG academy. Well, I found out this week from a journalist that somehow I had missed that the Governor also vetoed the IMG money the legislature had put in at the last minute. So, I need to publically apologize to you for misinforming you, especially around a political issue which we try to avoid most of the time. I have tried to justify my mistake in my head with things like, “well, just because I was wrong on this I am sure the Governor has done other things deserving of the criticism...” But darn it, God had to have Nathan do his self-justification busting story that lays the simple truth bare. And so I could not hold onto my justifications. I see I was wrong, and need to give Governor Scott credit for vetoing things that made everyone mad, even his supporters and friends. I have never liked eating crow for Sunday dinner, but I have to today. It is especially hard because I rather relished catching a person in power in such a clear ethical failure and was sure I was right and he was wrong. My personal demons of perfectionism and judgmentalism were on my right shoulder and my left. And though I thought truth was on my side, it was being blocked by my character flaws.

But back to David’s story we see that Nathan pronounces what the fruit of David’s failings will be... He will always be fighting battles, and someone from his own house will humiliate him the same way he humiliated Uriah. Now Nathan says God will cause this, Nathan quotes God as saying, “I will raise up trouble against you,” to David, but what if

God does not work that way, arranging trouble, but instead allows the natural consequences of actions play out. In that case Nathan is being prophetic, implying that because David got caught in intrigue and violence that he has sown the seeds of the same in the next generation. I struggle with the idea that God will manipulate others in the future to punish David, but it is reasonable to think that the logical consequences of David's actions are more of the same in the future from those around him.

In spite of this pronouncement of judgment, King David shows the strength of his character by responding to Nathan's words with humility and repentance. He utters the simple phrase, "I have sinned against God." And though we didn't read it in the very next sentence "Nathan said to David, 'Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die.'" Remembering the judgment just pronounced by Nathan, and the belief in those days that God was viewed as sometimes punishing by killing, this pronouncement of God's grace is amazing. Because of his simple confession, his willingness to see his wrongs, David experiences the grace of God.

This is one reason we have confession as part of our worship, because experiencing God's grace happens most deeply when we are able to see ourselves as we are; with all our character flaws and the many ways we fall short. The good news is God's grace is always there for us, but we experience it most deeply when we acknowledge the need for it.

In the night before his death, Jesus uses the story-telling of the Passover Feast to show God's grace to his disciples. Though he knows one will betray him, that they will all abandon him, he leads them in this family meal of joy and liberation where God's great deeds of power and love are remembered.

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it

Baruch ata Adonai elohaynu melech ha'olam hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz.

Blessed are you, O God, Ruler of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth

He broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body."

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks

Baruch ata Adonai elohaynu melech ha'olam borei peri hagafen

Blessed are you, O God, Ruler of the Universe, who brings forth the fruit of the vine

He gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

²⁶When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. ²⁷When 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** ¹and 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. ²The rich man had very many flocks and herds; ³but 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. ⁴Now 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." ⁵Then 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; ⁶he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

⁷Nathan 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; ⁸I 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. ⁹Why 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. ¹⁰Now 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. ¹¹Thus 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. ¹²For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." ¹³David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

