

**Sermon preached by Tom Haynes at St. Elizabeth's, Culver  
July 26, 2009  
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – Year B (Proper 12)**

**2 Samuel 11:1-15**

**Psalm 14**

**Ephesians 3:14-21**

**John 6:1-21**

*“May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be an acceptable offering in your sight, Oh Lord, my strength and my redeemer.”*

Last week I asked you to look at the Scriptures and pick out some themes for me. This week I am afraid to. I don't know about you, but that whole Bathsheba story is a tough one on a bunch of levels. It is the car wreck we can't make ourselves look away from on the highway.

Last week, we read in Psalm 89 “Once and for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David.” (Psalm 89:35) So God does not lie to David, but it seems like David is exploring all the ways he could lie this week. This week David lies by being deceitful and manipulative. He was lying with Bathsheba in the Biblical sense. He is lying around at home while his subjects are off fighting his wars.

I would like to remind you of some of the back story here. In 1 Samuel, Samuel is a judge, and he serves Israel as a prophet and a judge very well. His sons though are not very good judges, and the people call for a king. I'll read to you from 1 Samuel 8:

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, ‘You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.’ But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, ‘Give us a king to govern us.’ Samuel prayed to the Lord, and the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.’

So Samuel warns them that if God gives them a king like other nations, they will get a king like other nations. Kings in the Middle East have tendencies to abuse power and take advantage of their position. If you will think about it, this is not just a problem in the Middle East. Lord Acton famously said, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men.”

This must be a fairly universal experience, and I suspect you might be able to think of some examples in the news of people who got some power and were corrupted by it. I

will spare you any political commentary, but you can fill in your own favorite examples of the corrupt politician. For those of you who are Harry Potter fans, Voldemort famously says “There is no good and evil, there is only power...and those too weak to seek it.” You remember how he turned out. This being in power is a dangerous business for the king and the subjects too.

To quote the Rolling Stones, “You don’t always get what you want.” Samuel was trying to tell the people of Israel the same thing 3000 years before Mick Jagger was singing about it, and Israel was determined to have a king “like the other nations.”

Let’s fast forward from David to Jesus feeding the 5000 in today’s Gospel lesson. I am going to come back to the feeding itself in a minute, but I want to point out that after the miracle here, the Scripture tells us “When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.”

This is another example of how “You don’t always get what you want.” The people want a king, and Jesus has some other ideas. Last week Jesus told the disciples to withdraw to a quiet place to be better disciples, and this week, he is taking his own advice. He goes to the mountain by himself.

I think that the people are looking for another king like David. The problem is that when you go looking for a king like David, you may very well get one. I don’t want to seem to be critical of David, but he had his flaws. Jesus knew that it was not the old school king of Israel that they needed. Jesus was not going to lead the revolt and overthrow the Romans. He was looking to create a revolution within each believer’s heart and overthrow sin.

I told you I would come back to the feeding of the 5000, and now it is time. I heard a sermon two years ago on this text by a preacher from the Missionary Baptist Church in Gary, Indiana. It was a remarkable sermon in a lot of ways, but Brother DeWayne made some points that have really stuck with me. He first talked about the humble quality of the barley loaves the boy provided.

It seems that the barley loaves were the working man’s bread. You know how this works. When you are on a budget and eating at home, you have cornbread if you live in South Carolina or fry bread if you live in Wyoming. When you go to a fancy restaurant or to a rehearsal dinner, you have dinner rolls or croissants or something a little more refined. This barley bread is supposed to be the cornbread that sturdy blue collar guys who work construction have in their lunch pails. I like that image.

Andrew says in this morning’s reading “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” We are supposed to understand that this is not a fancy gift and it is not a big gift either. The boy may have even been reluctant to offer these gifts because they were so very small and humble. They don’t look like much in a couple of ways

The second point Brother DeWayne made is that God uses our gifts for great things. The details don't matter so much if we are servants to the Lord's will.

Now I talked earlier about David and Bathsheba as a car crash. We know we shouldn't look, and we can't help ourselves. I want to tie the Bathsheba story to the Gospel, and it is not going to be the stretch you are thinking.

Bathsheba came into the picture because David the king was abusing his power. This is what I would call a pretty humble introduction. She is in a tough place. She can't really say "no" to the king. Even when she says whatever she says, her husband still gets killed. Then Bathsheba loses the child who is born when it is seven days old. This is a pretty bad set of circumstances no matter how you look at it. She needs a support group to deal with the grief here. I can hardly begin to image the place she has found herself.

Bathsheba recovers pretty well all considered. She ends up as the mother of King Solomon, and she is mentioned as an ancestor of Jesus when Matthew does the genealogy in his Gospel. There were humble beginnings, and the relationship was what I would call flawed. God does his work, and we just have to be willing to let him work through us.

So the takeaways here...

The humble quality of our gifts does not matter to God. He calls us to service, and he will use our gifts to work miracles.

Bathsheba herself was dealt a really horrible hand of cards to play. Despite the layers of tragedy and grief in her life, she was the Queen Mother to Solomon and the great-great-great... grandmother of Jesus. God can take bad circumstances and use them for good.

We don't always get what we want. The people of Israel did not get the king they wanted. David seemed like that king at times, but he had his moments, and they weren't all good. They wanted Jesus to be king too, and he was not going to be another king like David. Jesus was a different kind of king. This is a good thing.

I see humble gifts and people struggling with tough circumstances. I see them in the Scriptures, and I see them in the world. So how do we respond to all this?

We offer our gifts.

When things don't turn out the way we would like, we roll with the punches and trust God.

*I have said these words in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen*