

The Source of True Strength

Psalm 14

Ephesians 3:14-21

John 6:1-21

Sermon text: 2 Samuel 11:1-15 (Text courtesy Vanderbilt Divinity Library)

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 ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

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.

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."

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.) Then she returned to her house.

11:5 The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

11:6 So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David.

11:7 When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going.

11:8 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.

11:9 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.

11:10 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?"

11:11 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."

11:12 Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day,

11:13 David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

11:14 In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah.

11:15 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 down and die."

And thus ends the scripture for today's sermon! Right there! We focus on David's dirty deeds today, and only on this, most likely the lowest moment of his life. At this point in the scriptures, he doesn't even seem to be aware that he does something wrong. Nathan makes David aware of it in next week's scripture. The focus seems to be, humanity's relative ease of doing evil. Even God's golden boy who was full of music and physical prowess, the most powerful political person, is capable of doing true evil. Or perhaps it is because of the earthly power that he is capable of doing such a deed. We've all heard that absolute power corrupts absolutely . . .

But this was God's chosen one, Beloved of God, he was special. And that is where the danger began. The first verse was that it was the time of the year when Kings go out to battle, but David remained behind. It doesn't say why he stayed behind - but it seems to be important to mention. If he had gone into battle, he wouldn't have been there to see Bathsheba bathing, which started the whole mess. But he didn't go, he stayed behind. And as the story is told, the redactor didn't mention any hesitation on David's part. He saw it, he wanted it, he felt entitled to just take it and do what he wanted to secure his desires.

Perhaps you should all be used to this kind of stuff, living so close to the nation's capital. There is fresh news on the radio practically every day of scandals. The latest is the corruption scandal in New Jersey, less recent, were the various sex scandals and it seems that on a regular basis there is the systematic manipulation of other's lives for political power.

Jesus seemed to be very aware that political power can be dangerous for the spiritual nature of humanity. That is why, in verse 15 of our Gospel reading, we'll see that "When Jesus realized that

they were about to come and take him by force to make him King, he withdrew again to the mountainside by himself." Because he was trying to show his followers that it was the community effort of living in understanding and support of each other that was God's will, not the structured power struggle of a political system. No political system will bring God's kingdom on earth, only communities can support common unity.

But then again, we see crime rate in the less privileged and see evil as a product of those who are disenfranchised. To quote that one guy from the musical *West Side Story*, "I'm depraved on accounta I'm deprived!" And then there are those "white color" crimes that we read about where the unsuspecting neighbor, loving father of 3 kids, ends up being arrested for something and everyone is just shocked and confused. No one ever suspected *Him* of even being capable of doing evil deeds!

And yet, none of us would want to take away the phrase, "and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us" out of the Lord's Prayer. Because we realize that we are all capable of doing something sinful, regardless of our socio-political situation in life.

What I am about to say is not to be interpreted as an attempt to change our practices here. I mention the following as a perspective in relation to this issue, and not as a conduit for change.

What I want to say is that I prefer the word 'trespasses' to the word 'sins' in the Lord's prayer. For me, it covers a different level of humanity than the word 'sins'. The word 'Sins' has such a strong connotation of guilt - it seems so extreme, that it makes it easier to overlook some of our guilt. 'Trespasses', in my opinion, covers those times when our strong wills usurp and override the wishes of other people. Those moments when we almost naturally try to overpower someone so that we can have what we want - very difficult to recognize them as a *sins*. Therefore, we don't need to be aware of it and ask forgiveness, it doesn't count when we pray.

It is so much harder to accept some damaging behavior as a sin, because that is such a strong word, and our nature is to protect ourselves from too much pain, so that we just do not recognize our behavior as a sin. But if we were to think of those times that we have trespassed - offended - infringed - transgressed - violated - treated irreverently . . . then our sinful nature has widened up a great deal, and we can see how manifest our dependence on grace *really* is.

In the face of the awareness of how susceptible we all are to 'sins', let's look for a minute at why we may sin, or trespass. In David's case, I suspect he may have just gotten so used to his power, that he focused on the strength of his political position, and began to overlook "the power at work within us [which] is able to accomplish abundantly far more than we all can ask or imagine." And I suspect that is the source of much of the evil that is done in this earth.

Darwin spoke of the survival of the fittest - and people began to see that this observation spoke to the human animal as well. People of all walks of life have a tendency to be egotists and survivalists, if not only for themselves, then for their family, their county, their state, their nation . . . but long before Darwin our religious legacy spoke of it, 'for God is with the company of the righteous.'

One aspect of our Christian heritage is the contemplation of what true strength is, what the source of that strength is and what makes it a stable enduring source of might. Might does not make right, often it causes more trespasses to occur which bring about pain. What our faith is founded on is the idea that Paul spoke of, "I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in *love*."

The riches of Christ glory have little to do with wealth of political power - that is what he withdrew from. It has everything to do with serving each other, sharing of the resources, trusting in God when afraid, but mostly in loving others more than ourselves. The source of true strength, as David discovered a bit late, is practicing self critic through focusing on the love of God.

If David had not been thinking only of himself, if David had put limits on his own actions according to God's commandments as laid down by Moses, he would have stopped himself and turned away when he realized he was trespassing on Bathsheba's privacy. He would have thought about the direction her life would take if he made an adulteress out of her, he would have thought about this wonderful noble man whose life was forfeited for the Kings personal pleasure. There was no love in David's choices here. There was no adherence to God's laws. There was only the law of self, which is weak and susceptible to sin.

So often in life we so easily slip into the law of self, and conveniently overlook the harm we may do. The Dalai Lama once wrote, "within the body there are billions of different particles. Similarly, there are many different thoughts and a variety of states of mind. It is wise to take a close look into your mind and to make the distinction between beneficial and harmful states of mind. Once you can recognize the value of good states of mind, you can increase or foster them."

Getting to the source of true strength takes time and effort and work. Getting to the point where one can recognize the value of good states can take time, and the exertion it takes to increase or foster those states is even more. Yet, when one is made aware, as through the example that we have of King David, and so many others in contemporary history, that the sin is just a slip of the grey cells away, and when we recognize the damage that they can do, that makes it all the easier to search for the true source of strength and justice.

And I believe that that is why most people search for a faith structure. We are here because we know the damage that can be done, and we seek Christ, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to strengthen us from the inside out. We "pray for the power to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ, which surpasses all knowledge, so that we may be filled with the fullness of God." Amen