

Who Me?

Have you ever heard the expression, "when you point, there is one finger pointing out and three fingers pointing in"?

Today's reading is something like that...Nathan, the prophet, decides he needs to confront King David about his relationship with Bathsheba. Nathan is a wise man and knows this will be a difficult conversation to have, yet it must be had. And so, in true biblical fashion, Nathan tells King David a story.

The story of a rich man and of a poor man. The poor man is content with what little he has and in addition to his family he has one female sheep that he bought and has raised her with his children. This one sheep is very important to this poor farmer.

The wealthy man has many flocks of sheep, and one day a visitor comes. The wealthy man is loath to slaughter one of his many sheep and instead, takes the lone ewe from the poor man and slaughters it for his company.

King David is furious with this story. He sees that what the wealthy man has done is stealing from the poor man, when he had more than enough that he could have slaughtered one of his many sheep. King David "said to Nathan, 'As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.'" (2 Samuel 12.5, 6, NRSV)

This is what we call righteous indignation. David feels outright rage because he sees the wealthy man taking what is not his and feeling no pity at all, for the poor farmer, or for the farmer's ewe. David is seething with something that he feels quite deeply...yet he is unable to see himself in this story.

If you remember a few weeks back we were hearing the story of King David, who ruled Israel for 40 years and was a righteous and good King. He was first and foremost a shepherd and was not initially presented to God as David's father Jesse introduced his seven older sons. The problem is as each son was presented to Samuel, none of them were found suitable.

So Jesse sends for David, who is out in the field, playing lute and hanging out with the sheep. He's quickly brought before Samuel and at once.

Perhaps it is for this reason, that David was a shepherd before he was king, that he reacts so strongly to Nathan's story?

Regardless, David is outraged and Nathan, for all intents and purposes holds up a mirror to him. "You are the man", says Nathan. You pointed one finger with righteous indignation, and forgot that there were three other fingers pointing back at you.

Nathan reminds David that God had given him everything he could ever want. He was anointed as King over Israel and Judah. He had six wives, each of whom bore him a son, and still he wanted more. The thing is, had David asked for more, it would have been given to him!

But instead of being happy with what he had; I mean, six wives and six sons is a lot for which to be grateful; he saw Bathsheba and decided he wanted her as well. Regardless that she was Uriah's wife, David wanted her. And when she fell pregnant, instead of owning up to what he had done, he tried to cover it up. And when that didn't work, he had her husband killed, in order that he could "comfort" Bathsheba in her time of mourning.

In short, David wanted something he was not meant to have. He took, with force, someone who was not his wife. He arranged for Uriah's certain death at the front of the battle, so he could cover up what he had done and in the end, get what he wanted...Bathsheba.

One finger pointed out, three fingers pointed in.

Nathan tells David that because his sins were committed in secret, God's anger would be kindled in the light, so that everyone would learn what David had done and the price of his sin would be paid.

David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' Nathan said to David, 'Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die.'

What would the cost of those egregious sins be? It would be in the taking of a life. Not David's life. Not Bathsheba's life. No, God would take the life of the son that Bathsheba conceived in violence, and gave birth to in King David's household. An innocent life would be the cost of David's sin.

You may be wondering why I don't assign some of the blame to Bathsheba? I mean, surely she isn't innocent in all this? She did "die with David", right?

King David saw her bathing. He sat watching over his kingdom and saw her finishing a mikvah, a ritual cleansing after finishing her period. She would have no idea that she was being watched. His ardour got the best of him and he wanted her. Never mind he already had six wives. He wasn't happy with what he already had...he wanted Bathsheba.

And in the end, he gets Bathsheba. The death of their firstborn son devastated both of them, especially Bathsheba.

King David, at first an innocent shepherd, becomes anointed because of something God would see in him. He survived an attempted coup, raised a strong army and led his people for forty years. His second child with Bathsheba, Solomon, would eventually succeed his father and also rule for forty years.

One finger pointed out, three fingers pointing in.

All of this to say that, when it comes to sin and righteousness, each of us has the ability to choose. Remember, the second greatest gift we receive, after the gift of Jesus, is the gift of free will.

David had a choice in whether to watch Bathsheba.

He had a choice when he called for her to be brought to him.

He had a choice when he lay with her.

He had a choice when he brought her husband Uriah back from the fighting.

He had a choice when he sent Uriah back to be killed.

He had a choice when he took someone that was not his and made her his own.

That choice, like all others, had a consequence. The death of their first child.

Yet the story of King David does not end there. He goes on to reign and to counsel his sons. He teaches them the art of warcraft and has a total of four sons with Bathsheba. It is believed she was his "favourite" wife.

David's first child with Bathsheba dies, as a consequence of his sin. David's second child with Bathsheba, named Solomon or Jedidiah is proof of God's love and forgiveness.

The thing is, my sisters and brothers, faith is not an easy thing. It is not a straight line from point A to point B. Faith is not a cut and dry, one-size-fits-all kind of thing. Neither is sin.

Every single person alive, at one time or another has committed sin. None of us is perfect. Not David. Not Peter. Not any of the apostles. None of the saints. Not even you. Certainly not me. The only being who comes close to being without sin is Jesus...and even then...but that is the subject for another sermon.

God chose David. Not because he was perfect. Because David, as a young man was defined as "ruddy with red hair". Not the typical description of a King. Yet David was CHOSEN to be King. He was groomed and instructed in how to be King.

He did great things. He commanded a great army. His sons would rule the known world and in their own right, would go on to accomplish many great things. And if you follow the lineage from David's father Jesse, you end up with Jesus.

So, the next time you find yourself judging someone you feel is not holding up the standard of what it means to be "good" or to be "just" or to be "holy"

remember that one finger pointed out, means there are three fingers pointed in.

None of us are deemed "worthy" of God's grace, forgiveness and love, AND YET every single one of us receives that grace, forgiveness and love, without cost and without guilt.

These are challenging times in which we live and there's a LOT of finger pointing going on right now. Put yourself in the other person's shoes, try to see things from their perspective. Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself, to share your opinions; based on fact, not feeling.

Know your worth. Share God's grace. And in the words of Dr. Bonnie Henry, "Be calm, be kind and be safe."

Amen.

2 Samuel 11.26-12.13a

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