

## PROPER 12, PENTECOST 9, YEAR B, JULY 25, 2021

Sometimes when we read the Sunday's assigned lessons, we question how the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel readings are related. What is the common theme or thread that ties them all together?

Today's Old Testament reading and the gospel is one of those Sunday's when you think what in the world were the authors of the lectionary thinking. What does the seduction of Bathsheba, the murder of her husband and adultery all by King David have anything to do with the feeding of the 5000? The connection appears to be farfetched.

Let's take a look first at the story of David and Bathsheba. It is a story as old as time. David sees Bathsheba from his rooftop bathing and is immediately consumed with lust. Unfortunately, oftentimes Bathsheba is depicted as the temptress who seduced David, but nothing could be further than the truth. She was in the process of her monthly ritual bath when David sees her bathing. Even though he finds out she is married, he commands that she be brought to him and sleeps with her obviously not caring about committing adultery. Let's be perfectly clear here too, Bathsheba didn't have a choice. David is the king who has all the power and control over his subjects. She is his subject and her husband is one of his soldiers. What David wants, David will take.

When Bathsheba discovers she is pregnant, David decides to concoct a scheme to bring her husband, Uriah, home from the war so he can have a conjugal visit with his wife. His hope is that Bathsheba can claim the child is Uriah's and absolve David of any responsibility or scandal. However, things did not go as planned as Uriah felt he would be dishonoring the rest of his comrades at war if he were to go home and sleep with his wife. So, he resisted and David's plan fell apart. Frustrated, David takes it to the next level and plots a calculated murder. He sends Uriah back to the front with a sealed message to his commander Joab to put Uriah at the forefront of the battle and for the rest of the troops to fall back. This message results in Uriah dying in battle, betrayed by his commander and his king. In this story Uriah, who is not a Jew but a foreigner, is the real hero, patriot and moral man unlike the anointed king of Israel, David.

When you think of all the stories up to now about David, he is considered one of the greatest kings of Israel and a man of great virtues. A list of his accomplishments, include victory over Goliath and bringing the kingdoms of Israel and Judah together and making Jerusalem the capital. David rescues allies, defeats enemies, prevails in one battle after another, and most importantly brings God's ark of the covenant home to Jerusalem with abundant rejoicing.

But then one spring day, when all the kings go out to battle, David does not go with them as is the custom for kings to do. Why is David not with his army? Does he feel too old? Is he tired of going to battle? Or has he become lazy and can't be bothered doing his duty? So, instead he delegates his responsibility to his top general. Whatever the reason for not going into battle, David is lounging at home in his comfortable palace with the army out in the field risking their lives, when he rises from a long nap, sees Bathsheba and everything starts to unravel. It's at this point that the hero and fearless leader David becomes, as one commentator put it, a schmuck. Here again is an age old story where a prominent figure falls from grace due to their own moral failings and need for power.

One of the main themes that we can take away from this story of Bathsheba, David and Uriah, is that David is a taker. He takes and takes again, to the great detriment of

many people. As king, David used his power and control to exploit and to take what he wanted. He takes the marriage of Bathsheba and Uriah from them. He takes Bathsheba for his own pleasure without regard for her welfare. He takes Uriah's life. He takes something from Joab by making him his accomplice in a murder. He takes his adultery and cover up and murder of an innocent man without a second thought. At this instance David is no longer the proud king and leader but is nothing but a taker and nothing more.

Now let's move to the gospel lesson of the feeding of the 5000. This is a story about giving. It's about Jesus seeing the basic needs of the people assembled and compelled to do something about it. He is also teaching them about the basics of giving. It is better to give out of your meager means than to hoard them because by sharing you become richer. His partner in showing concern is a boy willing to give up his lunch for others. This boy and Jesus are a pair of givers. Everybody's fed, with a startling supply of leftovers for later. In contrast to the story of David, there's no crime and no cover up here, but a conspiracy to give, rather than take.

It's interesting to note that after the crowd had eaten, they wanted to grab Jesus and make him king. Why do they want to do that? One of the things to remember is that the people are used to being governed by a king. In their minds King David was considered not just one of the good kings but the epitome of a good king despite his failings. David is their model because he had unified Judah and Israel and ruled powerfully. So, this is the kind of king they have in mind when they want to make Jesus king. They want a king to rule powerfully and rid them of the Romans. It's no wonder Jesus wanted to get away. He knows what earthly kingship means which is often to rule with power and control. He understands that earthly kings too often fail and take what they want, when they want. This is not who Jesus is. His kingship comes from giving.

What these two stories point out is that each one of us, on many occasions, faces a choice. We can be takers or we can be givers. Like David, we can participate in only caring about our own needs and take what we want. Or, we can be like Jesus and that anonymous boy, and give to people who otherwise would suffer.

In the gospel of John, this story points towards who Jesus is and the new kingdom that has come into the world in him. It is a kingdom that puts others' needs first and foremost. So, when Jesus tells the people to sit down he not only showed concern for the people by feeding them, but gave them the chance to dine together, to relax, to enjoy one another and to share. After the bread and fish were distributed we're told everybody had enough. Everybody was satisfied.

When it comes to power and control dissatisfaction is one of the things that authoritative rulers use to control the people. These rulers are good at pitting one faction against the other. But here in the feeding of the five thousand, everyone is satisfied. There is no need to look over there and say, "Oh, that person has more than me," or "why did they get that, how come they got blueberry pie, and I got stuck with Lima Beans. Everyone is satisfied. That's a mark of the new kingdom. That's a mark of how things are meant to be different with Jesus. Everyone is equal. Everyone shares.

At the end of the story we're told that there is an abundance. Unfortunately, our society is built more on the idea of scarcity where we've got to make sure we have enough for ourselves, even if it means denying others. But here in the feeding of the five thousand, everyone is not just fed, everybody is satisfied. The kingdom being inaugurated by Jesus is one where we not only believe in abundance, but we know there is abundance. That's

the mark of the kingdom of God. This is not a kingdom where the king takes for himself what he wants, when he wants, with no concern for whom it harms. This is a kingdom where equality and satisfaction is the same and meant for all. Where abundance and sharing are meant for all.

It only works if we are willing to reject the idea that the kingdom of God is something that gives us power. That because we think we have God on our side, we have control. That we can do what we want and take what we want in the name of God. Jesus demonstrated at the feeding of the five thousand that he came to dispel that idea. He came so all of us are satisfied from the abundance of God's love and mercy that is equally poured out on us and teaches us we are to live that same belief of abundance in our lives.

David was a good king, yet even as a good king he did terrible things. Jesus came to show us we don't need good kings, we need servant hearts. We need the one whose idea of kingship is in giving. If we want to be part of God's kingdom then we must be willing to serve, to give, to sacrifice, and to pour out our whole being in love for others. Amen.