



northminster presbyterian church

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SCRIPTURE: Psalm 51 2 Samuel 11:1-15

SERMON: How The Mighty Have Fallen (Rev. Susan Haynes)

Sex, lies, intrigue, murder... sounds like an advertisement for the next Hollywood blockbuster movie. But this story happened thousands of years ago. It happened when the shepherd boy who killed the giant and ultimately became king of Israel believed that he had become so powerful that he imagined himself exempt from the law of the God who had anointed him king of Israel in the first place.

You should know there are some, including the filmmakers of the movie, David and Bathsheba, who believe Bathsheba seduced David... that she knew her roof was visible from the king's roof and laid her trap, so to speak. That kind of thinking reminds me of those who say women who are raped did something, or dressed in some way, that provoked the act. There are others who firmly believe David did rape Bathsheba. As one of the king's subjects, she had no recourse except to go when David's servants came to get her for David.

Unlike many stories we read in modern literature, we are not allowed "inside the heads" of any of the characters in this story. We do not know what David is thinking or what Bathsheba is thinking. We can make suppositions all we want, but the bottom line is that it is about King David that the last line of the 11th chapter of 2 Samuel is written: *"But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."*

If we continue reading into chapter 12, we discover that it is against David that the prophet Nathan pronounces God's judgment. When Nathan accuses him, and the literal translation of the Hebrew is "You the man", no one but David is held accountable by God. Up until his "indiscretion" with Bathsheba, David had done pretty well for himself. He's the "golden boy" who can do no wrong. But when he missteps, he does it in fine fashion. This is not just David's story. It is not just a story about one man's libido getting the best of him and him going astray for a little bit. *It is the story of all of us.*

At this point you might be getting a little agitated with me. After all, you've never stolen another person's husband or wife. But... have you ever sinned? And has that sin resulted in far-reaching consequences? For me, that is what this story of David and Bathsheba is about. It is a story about the consequences of the choices we make. It is also a story about God's grace.

What if David had been on the battlefield with his troops rather than lounging around the palace and walking about on the roof? I think that at least one thing we can learn from this story is *not to let ourselves be in the wrong place to begin with.*

David should have been with his troops. That is where he had spent much of his life. But now, instead of being with his troops, he's at the palace. And because he has forgotten about the God who chose him to be king in the first place, because his heart is in the wrong place spiritually, being in the wrong place ultimately puts him in a place where he makes what turns out to be a deadly choice for many.

If you continue to read on in 2 Samuel, you find out just how far-reaching the consequences of David's choice become. While I'm tempted to share all of those with you, I would prefer, and I strongly encourage, that you take a little time and read the remaining chapters of 2 Samuel for yourself and see what happens. I will tell you one thing. David's choice resulting in the death of Uriah is just the tip of the iceberg!

How often do we find ourselves in the wrong place? David had convinced himself that it was about him and about what he wanted. It's a place we all know... "I want to do what I want to do and I don't want to do what I don't want to do even if I'm supposed to do it. It's about me."

When those times come in our lives, when we are convinced *it's about me* and we're walking around on the roof and we spy something tempting, then we are headed for trouble. When we are in that mindset, when we've laid aside all that God shown us to be right and holy, *then we are headed for trouble.*

I've been there on that rooftop. I've let myself get to a place where I think I know what is best for me. And, *arrogance of arrogance*, even what is best for others. I've let myself get to a place where I have made choices resulting in consequences that haunt me to this day and will for the rest of my life.

How do we keep from getting ourselves in the wrong place?

First we must recognize that we get in the wrong place when we become distanced from God, when we choose to let other things in our lives take precedence over our on-going relationship with the one who created us and loves us more than we can ever truly understand. As we can see from the story of David and Bathsheba, our being in the wrong place spiritually can have deadly consequences. More often though, for us, I suspect the consequences are less apparent.

This morning, when I stopped to get my usual morning of coffee at QuikTrip, I was the only one in the store. The young man behind the counter noticed the tag on the front of my Explorer and asked me if I had a child at Lassiter High School because he had graduated from Lassiter and would be headed back to college in just a few days. He then proceeded to tell me that he wished he had done things differently; that he wished he hadn't made some of the choices he had made when he first went to college. As a result of those choices, he had to drop out of school for awhile. Now he is back in college. But since his parents will no longer pay for his college education, he has borrowed money and also has to work at a job he really does not enjoy.

I didn't have the heart to tell him that the consequences of his choices would be far-reaching. That he would be paying back those school loans for years and that having to pay those school loans back might one day affect whether or not he could afford to buy a house or any of a number of other things he might otherwise do if he did not have that school debt hanging over his head. (By the way, this isn't my subtle way of telling all of you headed off to college for the first time or returning to college, to behave yourselves and make good choices...it really is something I experienced. But do behave yourselves and make good choices!)

I'm sure each one of us has a story of the ripple effect caused in our lives by choices we have made. I encourage you to remember that we are also able to make choices that have good consequences. That the good choices we make can ripple out from our lives into the lives of others and that as a result of choices we make, *others come to know of the goodness and grace of God.*

Remember I said earlier that this story of David and Bathsheba is not only about the consequences of decisions we make, but also a story about God's grace? God forgave David. Things that were set in motion as a result of David's choice were not magically set aside by God. But God did forgive David and David managed to live his life in the right place much of the rest of his life. The psalm that was read earlier was written by David out of his realization of the grace that God extended to him.

Will Willimon, a fine preacher and currently a Methodist bishop in North Carolina, reflected the following: "The empire is forever attempting to seduce you into the notion that you are here because you deserve it, because of your autonomous possession of intelligence, or nerve; that you stand alone, that you write your own story, without any outside help. Which means that you, like David, are susceptible, on the right afternoon, after a good lunch, to great sin. Which means that you, like David, when exposed to the right Bible story, on the right Sunday morning, are subject to great forgiveness."

May God help each one of us to be in the right place... to be in relationship with Him. and to enjoy, and be thankful for, the good consequences that will come from the choices we make from that right place: *that relationship with our holy and loving God!* **Amen.**

Psalm 51

1Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. 2Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. 3For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. 4Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. 5Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. 6You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. 7Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. 9Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. 10Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. 11Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. 12Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. 13Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. 14Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. 15O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. 16For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. 17The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. 18Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, 19then you will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

2 Samuel 11:1-15

1In 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. 2It 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. 3David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." 4So 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. 5The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant." 6So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. 7When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. 8Then 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. 9But 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. 10When 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?" 11Uriah 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." 12Then 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, 13David 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. 14In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. 15In 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."

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