***DAVID: WHY ME?***

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Texts: 2 Samuel 12:1-25 and Revelation 22:16

From the very beginning he was an unlikely choice to be king. When the prophet Samuel was sent to anoint one of the sons of Jesse as king, he lined them up and worked his way down the line from oldest to youngest. “Lord, is this the one?” No. “Then is this the one?” No. “Then is this the one?...” Several of the sons looked kingly and Samuel might have chosen one of them, but as a prophet of the Lord he could choose only the one God would choose and none of the older brothers was the choice. At the end of the line none of Jesse’s sons had been chosen, and then Jesse remembered the youngest who was out in the fields tending sheep. “This is the one,” God said. His father had not even thought to call him in from the fields to stand before the prophet. Yet, he was God’s choice, and so Samuel anointed David, youngest son of Jesse, as king of Israel. He was just a boy at the time, but unlike Tutankhamun (King Tut) he did not ascend to the throne right away. He went back to the fields to tend sheep and then fought Goliath and then landed in the court of King Saul as musician and friend to Saul’s son.

Across the centuries he is remembered as a warrior and songwriter, shepherd and giant-slayer, adulterer and murderer, dancer and king. Michelangelo chose him as the subject of a 15-foot sculpture that is recognized around the world. He is the standard by which all kings are judged in Israel, and the Gospel writers go to great lengths to trace Jesus’ lineage back to him in order to prove Jesus’ identity as the messiah of God. He is a legendary and complex character – this David, King of Israel. So, what new thing can we learn from him about leadership, or rather, what new thing can we learn about leadership from God’s relationship with him?

*God makes a surprising choice?* Yes, but we’ve heard that before.

*Age is not a barrier to being chosen?* Yes, but we’ve heard that before.

Perhaps the new thing we learn is derived not from David’s success, but from his failure, brought to light by the prophet Nathan. After King David’s tawdry tryst with Bathsheba Nathan came to the king with a problem to be solved:

There were two men who lived in the same community. One was a rich rancher with flocks and herds as far as the eye could see. The other man was a poor ranch hand who struggled to eke out a living and had but a single possession – a little lamb that he had bought with what little savings he had. The poor man raised that lamb; it grew up with him and his children. It would eat the same meager food as his family and drank from the tin cup that his children would lovingly tip to its mouth. It had the run of the house and would curl up with his children on cold winter evenings and offer warmth in its wooly coat. It was more of a pet than a wooly lamb chop, and like so many pets, became a member of the family. About that time a traveling friend of the rich rancher came to visit; he loved roasted lamb with mint jelly, so the rancher decided to have a lamb roast. Not wanting to take one of his own flock for the roast, the rancher stole the little lamb from the poor ranch hand, roasted it, and served it to his guest, leaving the poor ranch hand and his children with nothing. What should be the penalty for that rich rancher for the theft of the lamb?

In some corners of the Wild West the penalty for sheep stealing was death by hanging. The Law in Exodus decreed that one who steals and slaughters another’s sheep must pay four sheep in restitution. When the prophet Nathan posed this problem to King David, his answer embraced both penalties as David cried out:

*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.*

But the words were barely out of David’s mouth, when Nathan pointed one long bony finger at King David and announced: “YOU ARE THE MAN!”

In those four words was issued God’s indictment of David for breaking at least three commandments in his pursuit of Bathsheba:

10. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.

1. You shall not commit adultery.

6. You shall not kill.

David had violated those commandments, had abused his royal power, and had stolen from an honest, loyal soldier the wife he loved. *YOU ARE THE MAN!* indicted David as the guilty murderer and adulterer. He suddenly found himself in the boots of the rich rancher who had it all and still took from the poor. After all God had given him, David still lusted for more, lusted for Bathsheba, and did not hesitate to act on his lust.

We know the story, and while the role of Bathsheba is unclear (was she the innocent victim or the wily seductress?), the responsibility of David is crystal clear. He was the king who abused his kingly power. He was the anointed one of God, charged with following God’s commands and God’s commandments, and he violated those commandments for his own lusty purposes. He was guilty of adultery and then murder in trying to cover up his sin. David didn’t pull the trigger, but he issued the order that resulted in the death of Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah. He had Uriah sent to the front lines of battle, and there Uriah was killed and David’s problem solved – or so he thought. Such was David’s arrogance that he thought God hadn’t noticed. He believed God hadn’t seen or didn’t care or tacitly acquiesced in his adultery and murder until he heard those words: *YOU ARE THE MAN!*

David seemed to feel no remorse for his actions; he offered no confession or plea for God’s mercy. He simply returned to the business of being king, and at his first opportunity brought Bathsheba into his home as his wife. Why did David’s heart not ache over what he had done? Why did guilt not eat away at his conscience? Was it because he was king, or was it because he thought he was in the clear?

Before you point the finger at David, consider your own response. When you’ve done something wrong does it eat at you or do you move on without looking back? Do you accept responsibility for your wrongs or try to excuse them? Too often we rationalize our sins. We look past our wrongdoings and go about life as usual, as if nothing had ever happened,

as if we needed no forgiveness,

as if God hadn’t noticed.

But God sees what we cannot see in our hearts. God knows us and knows our sin and awaits our confession.

It was only when Nathan confronted David with his crime that the king finally confessed, “I have sinned.” Those were words David could not bring himself to say to the Lord until the words of the Lord cut to his heart – *YOU ARE THE MAN!* It was only then that he confessed his sin, only then that he accepted responsibility for his actions, only then that David realized he was the rich rancher who had no pity on his poor neighbor, the one who had done what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He, the King of Israel, God’s chosen one, was that sinful man!

And so am I! And so are you! The face of that man is the face of each of us, for in the words of the psalmist (who may or may not have been David) no one is righteous, not one! Not you, not me, not David. All of us are sinners who do what is evil in the Lord’s eyes from time to time, and we all need God’s mercy and grace. Like David we are better at judging others than we are at recognizing our sins. We are quick to judge David and the rich rancher and our neighbors and our leaders for their errors. But we are slow to confess our faults, slow to admit that we are as much in need of God’s forgiveness as they are. What will it take for you to look in the mirror and recognize that you too are THE MAN or THE WOMAN or THE BOY or THE GIRL of whom Nathan speaks, the one who has sinned against God? Must God send a prophet to point the finger at you? Must God come to you or might you first go to God and confess, “Lord, I have sinned”?

God knows we are not perfect, and God longs for us to recognize that truth for ourselves and to accept God’s forgiveness. That gift is freely offered in Christ who came to us, urging us to repent and believe the good news of forgiveness and new life. What is striking in this story of David is that even after violating those commandments and being slow to confess his sins, God did not boot David off the throne. God forgave him and while he suffered through the sickness and death of that son who was the product of his adultery with Bathsheba, he went on to father another son with her – Solomon – a son who would become a great king and build a great temple to the Lord, a son loved by God who would continue the line of David that would lead to Jesus, the messiah.

God can use flawed leaders – even deeply flawed leaders like David and me and you. We don’t have to be perfect to be instruments by which God does great things. But we do have to accept, as did David, the reality of our sin and the forgiveness God offers and so begin anew. Leaders are never perfect, sometimes far from it, and we should not expect them to be – even if “them” is us. But by the grace of God, God can work in us and through us and when necessary despite us for God’s good purposes. “You are the man” may be God’s indictment, but it also may be God’s call – to repent, to be forgiven, and then to lead. Amen