



“Getting Caught”

Text: 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13

a sermon by the Rev. Kevin Scott Fleming

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

The sordid story before us this morning is not unique to the scriptures. David’s story is not distinctive or exceptional. It is a common story – a tale of every time.

The background to the story is important to know. David was walking about on the roof of his palace, when he noticed a near neighbor – Bathsheba – bathing on the roof of her home. It is important to note that Bathsheba was married to a man known to us as Urriah the Hittite. David was smitten, shall we say, and sent for Bathsheba and went to bed with her. As it would happen, Bathsheba became pregnant and David was informed.

Scene two begins with David sending for Urriah the Hittite, essentially offering him some shore leave. Urriah returns home but does not go to his house. Instead, he sleeps at the doorway to the king’s house with the other servants. There can be little doubt that Urriah knew of the dalliance between his king and his wife.

Scene three finds David writing an order to his military attaché, Joab, in which the king orders that Urriah the Hittite be placed at the most dangerous part of the battle, in order that Urriah be killed in battle. Urriah is killed and word is sent to David.

And then our portion of the story begins. Bathsheba mourns for her husband. When the period of mourning was completed, David sent for Bathsheba and moved her into his house. She became his wife and bore him a son.

And then we read in the story, “But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.” Gee, you think so? What was the thing that David had done?

You might think it was his sexual contact with Bathsheba. After all, the commandment against adultery was well known to David. You might think it was his homicide of Uriah the Hittite. After all, there is also a commandment against taking a life and a commandment against abusing the stranger who lives among you, which Uriah was by the fact that he was a Hittite.

But, allow me to suggest one other possibility. It may be that the thing that David had done which displeased the Lord was his abuse of the power and authority entrusted to him. David used his position as king to get what he wanted. He did not look out for others. He took from others what he himself desired. From his position of privilege, David did as he pleased and that probably displeased the Lord.

In recent months, we have all been learning a lot about privilege. Many of us were born to it – simply because we were born white, male, and middle to upper class. The power of patriarchy is real and easily seen if one is willing to see it. You need only to look at your Olympic Games coverage to see it. Male volleyball players wear shorts and women volleyball players wear bikini bottoms. Male gymnasts are more dressed than female gymnasts. These are subtle – or maybe not-so-subtle – examples.

According to the United States Department of Labor:

women earn 82¢ for every dollar a man earns

women still earn less than men in most occupations

compared with white men with the same education, Black and

Latina women with only a bachelor's degree have the largest

paygap at 65%, and Black women with advanced degrees

earn 70% of what white men with advanced degrees earn

due to the pandemic, in February 2021, women's labor force

participation rate was 55.8% – the same rate as April 1987.

And women of color and those working in low-wage

occupations have been the most impacted.¹

Male privilege is real.

White privilege is real. The last two years have shown us in a

detail that is hard to miss that white Americans are treated one way and non-white Americans are treated in another way.

Economic disparity between white and black and brown

Americans is real. Educational opportunity is inequitable.

Housing opportunity is unbalanced. Employment between the

racess is disparate.

With privilege comes power. God entrusted David – as God entrusts everyone – to use their privilege and power – great or small

- for the benefit of all. David used his power and privilege to benefit only himself. Johanna W.H. Van- Wijk Bos, offers it to use succinctly: [David's] steep decline from at least the semblance of rectitude to depravity, whether judged by ancient or modern standards, is hard to fathom, especially for one who is said to uphold "justice and righteousness" and is eager to practice "loyalty."² The mighty have fallen indeed.

And David likely thought he had gotten away with it. But God had other plans.

Nathan the Prophet is sent to David and tells the king a story. It's rather brief.

There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.

David became enraged at the injustice of the rich man's action. "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die..." Oops. Gotcha!

Nathan lets the king have it. "You are the man!" David is as guilty as guilty gets. He finally admits, "I have sinned against the Lord." But Nathan says to David, "Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die."

Wait a minute! David has committed adultery and murder to benefit himself and receives forgiveness? Where is the justice in that? Where is the righteousness in that? It seems like David is getting off scot free!

No, the child of David and Bathsheba will die. There will be conflict in David's family. David will experience being a cuckold as his wives go off with other men. There will be punishment for his sin.

Perhaps we need to a reminder from the late Dr. Shirley Guthrie, professor of systematic theology at Columbia Seminary. Guthrie reminds us:

The basic truth is not that we are sinners but that we are human beings created in God's image. Sin distorts, twists, corrupts, and contradicts this truth, but it does not change us

into something other than what God created us to be. Sin is not stronger than God... We may disobey God and turn against other people, but we cannot really escape them. By our very nature we are dependent upon and responsible to them. We may refuse to acknowledge, but we cannot escape, the relatedness of our lives as human beings. Sin may become "second nature" to us, but it is never really "natural." What we are "naturally" is what God created us to be. All of us are sinners, but our sinfulness is something *unnatural*.³

In our abuse of our privilege and power, we commit grievous sin. We harm others. We hold others down. We keep others from being all that God created them to be. We rob others of their God-given dignity and worthiness. We diminish the image of God in ourselves.

We get caught in our sinful behavior. It makes us uncomfortable. We try to deny our guilt, but it clearly on display. We try to blame others for our guilt, but it clings to us like dog hair. We make every effort to minimize the pain we inflict, but we can't really do that.

We get caught. Just like David, we get caught. Our power and privilege cannot overcome our guilt. We get caught.

And God is there to "put away our sin." God is there to restore us to what God intended us to be. God is there to remove the culpability, the self-reproach, the shame of it all, and gift us with a new life, free from the burden of our transgressions. God is there to empower us to live in a new way - to love and serve God and neighbor - to be the people - the person - God created us to be.

That is why we are invited to this Table. There is no one on earth who can bar or exclude us from gathering here - no potentate, president, or pope has that authority. Christ is the host and the invitation to gather here comes from him and him alone.

Christ died so that we could be here. Christ allowed himself to be brutally and viciously killed so that we can be here. Christ was raised from death to remind us that when we were at our very worst - when we killed the Son of God - we could be forgiven and live in newness of life. When God caught us red-handed, we were forgiven.

Let us live that new life with which we are gifted. Let us use our power and privilege for all people - setting right ancient wrongs, honoring the image of God in all people, living humbly knowing that we are not better than anyone else, and doing those things that make for peace and bring wholeness where there is brokenness.

Let us be God's people - forgiven and freed. For now and evermore. Amen.

1) <https://blog.dol.gov/2021/03/19/5-facts-about-the-state-of-the-gender-pay-gap>

2) Van-Wijk Bos, *The Road to Kingship*, p. 283

3) Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine (50th Anniversary Edition)*, p. 213