

Beachburg Pastoral Charge Worship Service for August 29th, 2021

Welcome

Well, this is the last Sunday in August and I can't quite figure out where the summer has gone. As the days get shorter and I begin to notice a couple of trees that have already starting to turn colour, I know that fall is just around the corner. So, I am a bit saddened as this is likely the last Sunday that I will come to you from the Bunkie but I am also heartened by the fact, as we enter my favourite time of year, that we are getting closer to once again gathering in person as a church community.

In today's scripture we look at the Nathan the prophet's interaction with King David so let us begin with a Call to Worship based on the 145th Psalm which is attributed to King David

Call to Worship

Come let us celebrate, let us praise the Lord as long as we live.
Let us sing praises unto God. For Joyous are those who have called upon the name of the Lord. The Lord lifts up those who call out in faith. For who has not called upon the Lord's name in the middle of the night. And he has heard our cries and by his favour we are lifted from the pit.

The Lord watches over all and upholds the weak and sick.
And We praise the Lord for his constant presence.
Our Lord has turned our mourning into dancing.
To you O Lord we will give praise and thanksgiving.

Opening Prayer

Lord, we come before you today to stop and take a deep breath in your presence. We come in the midst of life with its struggles of health issues and family pressures. We come to be re-energized; seeking knowledge, friendship, healing and peace. For whatever reason we find ourselves here Lord, may we be open to you and to others around us, so that we may experience your love and will. In your Holy name, Amen.

Today I have included some songs that were recorded back in May by the Beachburg band of Heather, Jean, Ruby, Barry and Jim, who I know are eager to get back to our in person gathering So let us enjoy their opening number "How Long Has It Been?"

Scripture Reading- 2 Samuel 11:27b -12:23

²⁷ After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the LORD.

12 The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor.² The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle,³ but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

⁴ "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

⁵ David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! ⁶ He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

⁷ Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸ I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even

more. ⁹ Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰ Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'

¹¹ "This is what the LORD says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. ¹² You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'"

¹³ Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. ¹⁴ But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the LORD, the son born to you will die."

¹⁵ After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. ¹⁶ David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and spent the nights lying in sackcloth on the ground. ¹⁷ The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them.

¹⁸ On the seventh day the child died.

David's attendants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, "While the child was still living, he wouldn't listen to us when we spoke to him. How can we now tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate."

¹⁹ David noticed that his attendants were whispering among themselves, and he realized the child was dead. "Is the child dead?" he asked.

"Yes," they replied, "he is dead."

²⁰ Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate.

²¹ His attendants asked him, “Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!”

²² He answered, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, ‘Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.’ ²³ But now that he is dead, why should I go on fasting? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.”

Risking Honesty / Let's Have Lunch

In today's reading we meet a man called Nathan who is willing to risk being honest, and to criticize the king. In the verses preceding this reading from 2nd Samuel is the familiar story where, King David uses his royal power to take Bathsheba, and has one of his hatchet men arrange for the murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite.

What we know about Nathan was that he was a prophet sent by the Lord himself because of the seriousness of David's sins. In contrast to today's prophets of doom, who tend to predict an escalating social crisis, prophets in the Bible, do not foretell the future, so much as they deliver a message from God for the present day. Prophets were the conscience of society.

Presbyterian theologian Fred Buechner writes:-

The prophets were drunk on God, and in the presence of that terrible tipsiness no one was ever comfortable. With a total lack of tact they roared out against the phoniness and corruption wherever they found them. They were the terror of kings and priests ... There is no evidence to suggest that anyone ever asked a prophet home for supper more than once.

In the verses preceding today's passage, we watch, stunned, as David does whatever pleases him. He obviously does not count on the displeasure of God, or the prophetic word of Nathan.

It seems that just about every king seems to have had a prophet to be a thorn in his flesh and help keep him honest. King David had Nathan. David had successfully gotten rid of Uriah the Hittite by assigning him to front line duty where he was soon picked off by enemy snipers. After a suitable period of mourning which in Judaism is called Shiva, David proceeded to marry Uriah's gorgeous young widow, Bathsheba.

The honeymoon had hardly started rolling before Nathan came around to describe a hardship case he thought David might want to do something about.

There were these two men, Nathan said, one of them a big - time rancher with flocks and herds of just about everything that has four legs and a tail and the other a small time subsistence type with just this one lamb he was too soft hearted even to think about in terms of chops and mint jelly. He had it living at home with himself and the kids, and he got to the point where he even let it lap milk out of his own cereal bowl and sleep at the foot of his bed.

Then one day the rancher had a friend drop in unexpectedly for a meal and, instead of taking something out of his own overstuffed freezer, he got somebody to go over and commandeer the poor man's lamb which he and his friend consumed with a garnish of roast potatoes and new peas.

When Nathan was finished, David hit the roof. He said anybody who'd pull a stunt like that ought to be taken out and shot. Then in his judicial position as King he probably realized that capital punishment for robbery was not authorized under Judaic law so David argues that at the very least he ought to be made to give back four times what the lamb was worth. And who was the greedy, thieving slob anyway, David wanted to know.

“Take a look in the mirror the next time you’re near one,’ Nathan said. It was only the opening thrust. By the time Nathan was through, it was all David could do just to pick up the receiver and tell Room Service to get a stiff drink up to the bridal suit.

We make choices as we interpret a Biblical text. This morning, I choose to look at what I would call risky statements made by three of the leading characters. When you make a statement like this you leave yourself vulnerable, you expose yourself to risk by speaking honestly.

Sometimes in life, we are afraid to risk honesty, because we never know what might happen once we utter an honest word - or maybe we know all to well what will happen. We may be putting our life, our job, our relationship on the line by being honest.

Well let us listen as the three leading characters in our scripture speak honestly:

Bathsheba says: “I am pregnant!”

Nathan says: “You are the man!”

David says: “I have sinned!”

Not every man responds with joy and cigars, to a wife or

in this case, a girl friend, who announces - I'm pregnant! You might say what else is a woman to say. If she is, she is. And it isn't just her doing. I don't know, but I suspect there are many instances of hesitation, even fear in announcing a pregnancy. Will he run? Will he have regrets? Will he still love me? A very real risk taken by Bathsheba.

Nathan takes a huge risk in confronting David, even though he uses a beautiful psychological technique - tell a story and hope that the person sees themselves in the story. Let them react, and then you just confirm their observation. Not a bad strategy for dealing with your children, or your parents, your friends across the back fence. It is maybe not as honest as direct confrontation, but it sure helps people like Nathan whose career and very life might depend on David's reaction to Nathan's criticism. He could be fired, ignored, even killed.

But perhaps an even greater risk is taken by David. I have sinned. Do you see that there is still something good left in David. God had called and God had chosen him for a purpose. David sees in this moment of recognition that he cannot buy off or banish or murder Nathan. He cannot even ignore him, or remain unmoved by the prophet's words.

David sees in this moment of recognition that he is responsible, and that he has to start acting responsibly - as a man, and as a king. Oh sure, we might say its too little, too late, David. Where were you in earlier in chapter 11? What were you thinking? My God man, what were you thinking when you took Bathsheba?

And what about this vengeful God that is introduced in verse 14? One who is willing to sacrifice David's son, a God that flies in the face of our all loving, all forgiving God? On the surface we may think that David has failed the test, that his actions are too little, too late, but his enduring repentance and supplication in the hope that the child would be saved shows us something. In real life, in life described in these old stories, in life lived in religious faith, it is never too little, and never too late, to speak, to confess, honestly.

Not that risking honesty will solve all our problems. David does not get off scot free. Confession does not wipe the slate clean. He will bear the scars of this encounter the rest of his life, as will Bathsheba. David will end up a beaten and broken-hearted old man, feeble, frail, shivering in his bed, his teeth chattering. The first chapter of 1st Kings tells us they will search the kingdom for the youngest, most beautiful young woman

they can find. She will snuggle up beside him in his bed, under the covers, but will not be able to bring him warmth.

But for the moment, David can live. For the moment, David can begin anew.

I think that David's risk is in some ways the greatest, because no one knows what will happen when we make a confession.

If you go to a child, to a parent, to a spouse, a friend, a neighbour, to God, and say 'I was wrong. I'm sorry', you are potentially opening yourself to the greatest adventure that life has to offer. A new life. A new relationship.

That's what this sermon should be about. The rest is window dressing. God is a God of forgiveness, and forgives endlessly when we are honest.

Now, I could just come right out now and ask you directly, and you could ask me 'Are you going to make any kind of honest confession to God or to another human being this week? Are you going to risk honesty this week?'

But instead of putting us on the spot, let me use Nathan's method and finish with a story. By telling a

story, we can each reflect on the story's truth. This fall we are planning a college reunion with my buddies who graduated from aviation technology 40 years ago.

Unfortunately, we will be missing my friend Kevin who died 11 years ago in a drowning accident.

A tragedy one not unlike David had to face with the loss of his son. An incident that at the time had us angry at God, confused over the purpose of our friend's death. How did I deal with this loss at the time? The answer was to come in the memory of an honest confrontation that I had with Kevin during our college years.

You need to know that during our college days, as well in later years on the golf course, I was always in constant competition with Kevin. Whether it was on written exams, or competing for the best mark on a flying test, or trying to get each other lost while flying during low level diversions during flight training north of Sault Ste Marie, there always seemed to be a level of tension in our relationship, and one day after an unusually heated debate after a training session he said, 'Let's go to lunch. I want to talk.' Being a poor college student I said, 'You buyin'? He said, 'Yeah. Come on.'

We went to a Purple Lantern restaurant, sat down and got a menu. As I eyed the most expensive thing on the menu, the conversation, in a nutshell, went like this. He said, 'Uh, you know how we're always on opposite sides of every issue?' And I said, 'I know.'

And Kevin said, 'And I'm always hoping that you will smarten up and you never do.' And I said, 'I know. I keep waiting for you to do the same.'

He said, 'I've come to the conclusion that it's going to be this way from now on.' I said, 'I think you're right.'

And then he said, 'But I want you to know that I value you as a person and how our relationship makes me a better person.' And at that point I choked on my beer. I never dreamed that he would say such a thing.

And I never dreamed that such a thing would mean so much to me. But it did and he did.

His honesty formed a bond that was to define our friendship. This morning I find myself reflecting and asking 'Who do I need to take to lunch?'

Who do you need to take to lunch? Amen.

Prayers of the People and The Lord's Prayer

Almighty God we come into your presence with a honest and humble heart, asking that you hear our prayers.

May we continue to pray for an uphold our loved ones on that are on minds today, especially for those who we feel there is nothing more we can do. May they be found by a love that empowers and upholds them. May they be found by Your love.

Hear the cries of those who are burdened by illness,
by sadness,
by loss of security,
by a weariness that drains the joys of life.

May they discover again what it is to be known by your love.

Gracious God, Hear the names we have in our hearts. The loved ones we care for and worry about as we bring their names to you in silence.

Precious God we thank you for your presence and for your understanding. With love and affection we pray that you will walk with those we love and with us, helping us to show others how we have been touched by the love of Jesus Christ.

We rest now in the assurance of your love as Creator of all that is good, and may we be enlivened to participate in Jesus' work of reconciliation on behalf of all the world, as we share in his eternal life, here and now, and forevermore. we pray all this in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray Our Father who art in heaven

Well with the unsettled weather the last couple of days and with the hope that your area receives some needed rain I leave you with one of my favourite classic hymns performed by the band. "Showers of Blessings"

As I have mentioned I will be on holidays next week and look forward to meeting you at our worship BBQ at our home on Hazley Bay. Until we meet again.