

“Sometimes a Prophet Needs a Prophet”

(A Dramatic Sermon)

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

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Sometimes a prophet needs a prophet. Do you know what I mean? None of us ever sees the whole picture as God sees it. And so, even when we are doing our best, we may be missing something.

There had been times before when I thought I knew what God wanted, but turned out to be wrong. David wanted to build a house for God and I said, “Go for it!” But then, God spoke to me in the night and said in no uncertain terms, “I don’t need a house.” (2 Samuel 7:1-14a)

It’s a bit tricky. To be a prophet you must have bold conviction. You can’t challenge the authorities and speak for truth and justice if you waffle about with milk toast equivocation. But I have come to realize that somewhere deep in the quiet of my own heart and mind I must be willing to say, “About this I may be wrong or at least not know it all.”

I believed I was doing the right thing, the courageous thing, the thing God wanted me to do in confronting David. And to be clear, I have no second thoughts about whether he needed to be confronted or whether I was too harsh on him. I’m just not sure I addressed everything I should have. I tried to speak for God and justice. But did I? Did I?

You know this story. It’s one of very few you remember from our national history. For all the pious protests about violence and sexuality in the media of your time, what are the stories you remember? The one about David killing Goliath, with a slingshot, and then beheading him... and the one about David and Bathsheba, you know the one... It’s like driving by an accident, you don’t want to look, but you do.

It was spring, the historian says, the time of year when kings went out to battle (2 Samuel 11:1f), like it’s just normal to go kill a bunch of people in the spring. In that season, when David was walking about his roof, the writer says he saw a beautiful woman bathing, inquired as to who she was, and upon discovering that she was Bathsheba, the wife of

Uriah the Hittite, he had his messengers bring her to him so that he could “lay with her.” You’ve got to love those euphemisms!

Anyway, the point is he saw a hot babe and decided he had to have her! It didn’t matter that she was married. It didn’t matter that he was married, to numerous women, by the way. The king could do whatever he wanted. It was good to be the king! Kings had their own definition of normalcy. They went to battle in the spring. They took the women they wanted. What did Bathsheba want? It didn’t matter. She was Uriah’s property. If there was any offense here, it was to him.

But, of course, this was just the beginning of Uriah’s troubles. For Bathsheba became pregnant and Uriah had been away. He was at the battlefield, fighting for his king. So, David had Uriah brought near so that he would “lay” with his wife and everything would be “O.K.”

But Uriah was an honorable man, much more honorable than his king. He wouldn’t spend time with his wife while his fellow soldiers were risking their lives, for king and country. So, David had him sent to the front, to the most dangerous place where he would be killed, which he was. And then, he sent for Bathsheba and took her as his wife.

What did she think of that? It didn’t matter. She grieved the loss of her husband. She needed protection. Who knows? She had no choice, no say in the matter.

So, this brings us to your reading today. God was not pleased with any of this, to say the least. God’s chosen king was behaving poorly. It didn’t concern public leadership, it was about private morality, but there is no separation of these realities in God’s eyes. Character is character. So, my mission, should I choose to accept it, was to confront him, the king, that is, the one who could have me killed in the blink of an eye.

I considered this, I assure you, but on the one hand, I risked offending the king, and on the other, I risked offending God. There was no third option where no one was offended. I don’t know what you would have done, but this was an easy choice for me. I’m standing with God every time and letting the chips fall where they may with the king.

But I couldn’t launch a frontal assault. I needed a story with which to entrap him. And so, I came up with one, my very best, if I do say so myself - the story about two men, one rich and one poor, where the rich

man takes the poor man's beloved ewe lamb and serves it to a traveler. I laid it on thick, made David get sentimental, and then, when I had set the hook, when he said, "The man who has done this deserves to die," I said boldly, trying to mask my fear, "You are the man!"

I went on to unpack God's message which didn't really need unpacking. Any parable you have to explain has missed its target. He got it. I had him at, "You are the man," but, just to rub salt in the wounds, I went on to say that his actions of sleeping with another man's wife and then having the man killed to get him out of the way were offensive to God, and as a result, David would be punished.

Anything could have happened at this point. David could have had me killed. Many leaders lack the moral character to admit it when they are wrong. But for all his faults, David had character, and he actually believed in God. So, he said, "I have sinned against the Lord."

I tried not to let him hear my sigh of relief... and then, I went on to pronounce God's judgment. God would forgive him, David would not be struck down, but the child Bathsheba was carrying would die. There would be consequences to David's actions.

At this point, I felt pretty good. I had stood up to the king, I had delivered the message, I had been true to God's calling. Justice had been done... or had it? The king got what he had coming, but it seemed like something was missing in all of this, someone was missing.

Bathsheba - she was the victim here, along with Uriah and the unborn child. She had been forced to lay with the king. She had to carry a child to term only to have the child die. Where is her voice in this story? When I confronted David, I did not mention her name, at least according to the writer, I don't remember. She was only, "the wife of Uriah the Hittite," his property, just an incidental detail in the story.

And this is how it was in those days, but still, I knew better, or should have known better. I am a prophet of God. God's concern is for all of God's children. How could I have been so blind?

I suppose all human concepts of justice are limited. We never seem to get it all. We are all products of our time. Amos criticized the men of Israel because father and son lay with the same slave girl (Amos 2:7) as if it would be "O.K." so long as they lay with different slaves.

And sometimes we realize Rome wasn't built in a day, as they say. Change tends to happen incrementally, we have to choose our battles carefully, especially if we want to be an agent of change, rather than simply a witness to truth, whatever the consequences.

I know all the arguments, but it still sounds like rationalization to me. I should have known better, I should have done more for Bathsheba. She was part of the #MeToo movement long before it existed, and I didn't cover it up, I just didn't do enough for her. I could have at least forced David to give her a choice about her future.

But what would you have done? Indeed, what have you done in your time? Where is there still injustice in your world and what have you done to play the role of the prophet? Where are people being treated unfairly, abused, neglected? And who is speaking up for them?

One might think all these years later women are treated as equals, but no matter what your laws say, the inequalities are still measurable, the good old boy networks still cover up abuse, the #MeToo movement is just getting started and people will do what they did to Bathsheba – blame the victim. “Why was she bathing that time of day? What did she expect, a good-looking woman like her?” You know the lines.

How about the immigrants coming to your land, many of them refugees? How are they faring? What about the children still separated from parents? How about the working poor in your land who get left further behind with every benefit given to the rich? What about those who are struggling with addiction, an illness, not simply a moral failing? Are there any prophets speaking up for these people and others, even at great risk? And are they getting it all or are they missing something?

Sometimes even a prophet needs a prophet because no one sees all that needs to be seen. And understand that prophecy is not primarily about seeing the future. It's about seeing how God feels about things right now and letting people know so they can act accordingly. There is mercy available to those who fall short like David, which is all of us, though there are still consequences. But who will speak for those who have no voice, the Bathshebas and Uriahs among you? Who will play the role of the prophet, and when the prophet loses courage or lacks vision, who will be a prophet for the prophet? Will you?