

**“Seeking the Courage to Speak the Truth”
(A Dramatic Sermon)
2 Samuel 11:26–12:13a
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First Baptist Church, Raleigh
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Have you ever had to do something that you knew was right, but it still just made your gut clench? Have you ever had to confront something or someone about an issue that just would not just go away? I certainly have, it’s a part of my job, as a matter of fact, so I can’t be a conflict avoider, even if I want to be.

I’m a prophet and prophets speak difficult truths, prophets speak truth to power, prophets engage conflict when their calling requires them. People think of prophets as messengers of God who predict the future. Well, sometimes future consequences are involved, but mostly we convey to people and nations what God thinks about what they are doing right now, and I can assure you it is not usually a nice pat on the back, an atta’ boy or atta’ girl. People need affirmation and encouragement, and this can be prophetic at times, but usually when a prophet shows up, he or she is not bringing good news.

Such was the case when I had to confront King David. You’ve read the story today. And you know what he did. You read about that last week, some poor soul in your church had to read that out-loud... how he was not with his troops at war like other kings but was taking it easy at his home — just chillin’, puttin’ his feet up, drinkin’ some wine. How he saw this babe bathing and decided he had to have her! She wasn’t trying to entice him, she didn’t deserve it, as some will suggest, she was in her private home, but David had the tallest building and could see everyone else’s business if he wanted to.

Anyway, you know all about this, how he called for her, forced her really, she had no choice; how she became pregnant; and then David had to somehow make it look like her husband Uriah was the father, but he wouldn’t lie with his wife while his fellow soldiers were risking their lives in war. Even when David made him drunk, he wouldn’t indulge

his own personal desires. What a stalwart example of character Uriah was in contrast to his decadent, conniving King! So, David sent Uriah to the front and had him killed. He didn't do the killing, but he was responsible. You don't have to hold the sword to be a killer. So, David, our King, a man after God's own heart, was a rapist and a murderer. You may not like the language, but it's what he was.

Needless to say, God was not pleased, but David was apparently clueless. He didn't think he had done anything wrong. He'd been a perfect King. Well... this could not stand. Someone had to confront him. Guess who drew the short straw on that one?

So, how do you get up the courage to do it? For me, it began with the knowledge that this was not my message, it was God's. David might have become angry and had me put to death for forcing him to confront these inconvenient truths. But the only alternative to offending David was offending God. That was an easy call. I always sided with God!

But the other thing that helped me in situations like this was the knowledge that I didn't create the awkwardness of the moment. David did! I didn't love conflict, though I wasn't a conflict avoider, but when the conflict was clearly not of my doing, why should I have beaten myself up emotionally? The truth was I was more angry with David than anxious about his response.

He was a friend, and he had so much potential. He was not simply a lecherous, power-seeking narcissist like many kings and leaders. He was a man with goodness in him, a man who genuinely cared about the wellbeing of the people he governed, a man who wanted to please God, or at least a part of him did. It made it that much more difficult to confront him. I wanted to hug him and kick him in the shin at the very same time! He had so much potential, but he was jeopardizing it all.

So, I got past any hesitation I may have felt, and as you have read, I delivered the message God had for David. I did it in a rather creative way, if I say so myself, but then, as a wise man once said, he who tooteth not his own horn hath not his own horn tooted. I wasn't being self-protective with this story. I was trying to get David to hear me, to get the message. He had built up walls of resistance to the truth, he was self-deceived to the core, he really thought he was blameless. As

another wise man once said, de-Nile is not just a river in Egypt... OK, file that under “Humor/Bob O/Bad” – but it is still true. It would take some careful planning to persuade David to listen.

So, I told the story about a rich man who took a poor man’s one precious ewe lamb and sacrificed it for a traveler to satisfy the requirements of hospitality. The rich man had more than enough to share but figured he didn’t need to use his goods since he could take the poor man’s. With wealth comes power and he used his.

Hearing this story, David was angered. He had a sense of justice deep within him. He was not rotten to the core. He took the bait and bit into the hook, saying, “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die.” At which point, I swallowed deeply and said, “*’at’tah ha ish*” — you are the man!

There was complete silence in the room as the truth started to sink in and David’s heart with it. I reminded David all that he had done and how it had gone against God’s desire. I told him about the consequences he would face, not even getting to the part where his son would die, when he said, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Finally, he got it. He took responsibility, unlike so many men, so many powerful leaders like him. I wasn’t ready to make him a saint, but it did at least restore my hope that there might be a future with his leadership, just hope, that would be up to God and whether David’s contrition endured.

So, what does any of this have to do with you? Well, I might begin with a question – is there anyone like me today, is there anyone who speaks as a prophet to your leaders? No king or leader of any kind should be without some forum for review, critique, or correction. Leaders need enough authority to lead, but that authority cannot be absolute. Is there someone who speaks truth to power, if not a court prophet, someone who has a chance of being heard, or the authority to effect change? Even David, a good man, desperately needed a prophetic voice, and not all leaders have his good qualities, as I am sure you know.

I realize that in your land, the people as a whole have the final say, and that is noble. It works the same way in a Baptist church, and it too is noble, though I wouldn’t have that job! I answer to God and God

alone, not the people God wants me to deliver messages to... But your democratic ways have value, as long as you keep to them.

But this story isn't just about leaders. All people have flaws that need correction. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, your tradition says. All we like sheep have gone astray, says mine. All of us need help and all of us build up walls of resistance to the truth. What can get through to us? Who can get through to us?

We each have our own personal shortcomings, ways we betray what we know to be God's intent for us. We can also be complicit with others who act unjustly. And we have our own places of privilege and power that can be misused to the detriment of others. We may not have the power of a king, but most of us have some influence. How do we use it? Most of us have some degree of privilege. How do we view it? Oh, I know, you will say, "But I'm generous, I'm not selfish. I'm not racist or sexist or ethnocentric or jingoistic..." and you may not be. That's between you and God. But that's between you and God. As I have said, denial is not just a river in Egypt, and it runs deep in all of us.

But there is one other thing I would note — find the courage to overcome the tension in your gut when you need to confront something or someone, not to let anyone have it, but to improve life. For me not to have confronted David would not have been in his best interest. Often the kindest thing we do is speak a difficult truth. It's our discernment of truth or divine intent. We may be wrong. But if you are convinced something needs to be said, say it, with grace, and in love. We should all look into our own hearts first, and then see what we can do for others.

Before I go, I must say I was not completely at ease with all that happened after I confronted David. Why did the child have to die? Why didn't Bathsheba get justice for her trauma? According to your writer, I didn't even call her by name. I referred to her as "the wife of Uriah." If that is true, God forgive me! And did David get what he *deserved*?

I don't know. I don't know what I would have done. All leaders make mistakes. The good ones, the truly strong ones, acknowledge them, ask forgiveness, and seek to do better. Look for that in your leaders in the church and everywhere else, and in yourself. And seek the courage to speak the truth that needs to be spoken.