



“Dynasty – Coverup”

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday & Sunday, July 28–29, 2018

All Services

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1 Samuel 11:1-15

This is the first "official" time I am preaching at Trinity. Today brings lots of nerves and pressure, which I am putting on myself. I love preaching though. I love this opportunity to bring the good news to you, God's people. But – yes, there is a but – I do not love preaching stories such as the one we just heard from 2 Samuel. While I was an intern, I joked that the Holy Spirit always gave me the hard stories to preach. I joked that the Holy Spirit was trying to whip me into preaching shape, showing me that the good news could be proclaimed, even in stories of violence, suffering, and death.

When I saw that my first sermon here at Trinity would be on the story of David and Bathsheba, my first reaction was "ugh.... not again." In these moments, I often want to fight the Holy Spirit. Ignore the nudges – or let's be real... the shoves – in a certain direction. But, as I wrestled with the story this week, I kept coming back to the theme, "Coverup" and realizing that my call today was to avoid participating in the covering up of this story. The issue with the story of David and Bathsheba is its subject and content; this story has elements to it that we don't talk about in church: sex, deceit, violence, and menstruation. If I'm being honest, this week I thought, "Oh God... where is that good news in a story about sex, deceit, and violence. But, I realized if I ignored those things, I would be participating in covering up this truth and that would do all of us a disservice.

The truth is David does something horrible in today's story from 2 Samuel. His actions are so horrible that David realizes he must cover them up. This cover up spirals out of control to the point of murder. But, before we can even touch the cover up, we must be honest with ourselves about what David is covering up. It seems at first read that David is trying to cover up a pregnancy, but there is more to the story than just that. We must dig a little deeper into this story to really see it; the story gives us clues that point to more than an unintended pregnancy.

First off, the beginning of the story tells us that the army is out fighting; they are away from Jerusalem. BUT – this small word 'but' tells us a lot – David wasn't out fighting with the army like the other kings. David was in Jerusalem. Because he was in Jerusalem, this episode follows; David goes out to the roof top where he can probably see all around Jerusalem. There, we are told he sees a beautiful woman bathing, doing what the Jewish purity laws require of her after her period, which made her unclean. Instead of walking away, David sends someone to find out who this woman is. He is told that her name is Bathsheba, and she is married to one of David's loyal soldiers, Uriah. Even

though, she is married – and so is David – he uses his power and influence as king "to get" Bathsheba, which is the verb the New Revised Standard Version uses. However, the Hebrew would tell a different story. The NRSV "softens" David's order because the Hebrew truly tells us that David's messengers took, captured or seized Bathsheba. The NRSV translation almost attempts to give Bathsheba agency that she doesn't have. Bathsheba is brought to David, and David – again, using his power and influence – has sex with her. David rapes Bathsheba and sends her home. Bathsheba becomes pregnant and so begins David's varied and multiple attempts to cover up this illicit and grievous action of objectifying and raping a married woman, which leads to the death of an innocent man.

David and Bathsheba's story should sound familiar to us. It is a story that has been playing out with disturbing frequency lately. This story is about a powerful man who abuses his power, takes advantage of a woman, and he thinks he can get away with it. David could be replaced with Bill Cosby, Harvey Weinstein, or Larry Nassar. The sad reality is these stories are not isolated; sexual assault and harassment is happening everywhere, and as we are hearing today, even in the Bible. This fact tells me that I cannot be complacent in the cover up. This fact tells me that I must be a part of uncovering the truth. The truth is David sexually assaults Bathsheba, and then tries to cover it up.

David isn't the only one who has tried to cover up this story. Past commentators and biblical scholars are guilty of trying to cover it up. Biblical commentators have made Bathsheba the scapegoat of the story; they have blamed her for David's actions. In their interpretation of this story, they have said things like: "Why was she bathing on the roof?" "Did she want David to see her?" These words are essentially the equivalent of "She asked for it." How could Bathsheba know that David would be on the roof? Bathsheba is merely doing what is expected of a Jewish woman.

Even Hollywood producers have tried to change how this story is told. They have tried to rationalize David's actions. There are two movies that portray this story. One of them from 1985 stars Richard Gere as David. In this film, Bathsheba confesses to David that Uriah, her husband is abusing her, so David has Uriah killed. David is a hero! Another movie based on David and Bathsheba's story romanticizes it. This film called *David and Bathsheba* from 1951 portrays it as a love story. David's actions against Bathsheba are portrayed as mutual.

But these interpretations and movies do not reveal much truth; they participate in the covering up of this story. I refuse to do the same. I refuse to be a part of the cover up.

As a pastor and as a Christian, I am called to be a part of uncovering the truth. I am called to be a part of a larger uncovering that is happening all around us. I am called to participate in God's work of uncovering the Kingdom of God in our world, and so are you!

The Kingdom of God isn't some far off place that is yet to be achieved. The Kingdom of God is all around us. It is here; it is now. The Kingdom of God is a place where all people are loved, cherished, protected and cared for. Actions like David's, like Bill Cosby's, like

Harvey Weinstein's, like Larry Nassar's are evil. These actions are sins. These actions work against God's Kingdom. They attempt to destroy God's Kingdom. They attempt to defy and defeat what God seeks for all people, for all of God's beloved children.

Uncovering of the truth is happening all around. It has taken the form of the #MeToo movement. Maybe your Facebook and Twitter newsfeed were full of #MeToo's last October like mine? This movement, begun by Tarana Burke and publicized by Alyssa Milano, sought to demonstrate the magnitude of the sexual assault and harassment. It has sought to uncover the truth, to name sexual violence as a problem – as a societal epidemic. The Me Too Movement's work of uncovering has been this work of acknowledgement, of bringing awareness, of bringing things to light.

Uncovering the truth has taken the form of feminist biblical and theological scholarship. For the last several decades, women biblical scholars have been attempting to reverse the coverup of Bathsheba and other women's stories in the Bible, working to re-interpret this story and others through their unique lens as women. These women are bringing new voices and perspectives into the biblical and theological conversation that haven't been there before. These authors are trying to uncover these stories misinterpreted or covered up for so many years.

The uncovering of truth is also happening in our church, the ELCA! Perhaps, you have read the latest issue of [Living Lutheran](#)? The key subject of this issue is the draft social statement on "Women and Justice." But, if you haven't heard, the ELCA is in the process of reviewing this draft statement. The social statement names sexism and patriarchy as sin. It acknowledges – uncovers – the ways that our own church has participated in sexism and the patriarchy. But, it explores possible avenues for justice for women and all people in the church and in our secular society as well. This is a plug... In fact, all Lutherans – you! - are invited to participate in reviewing and commenting on this draft. The Lower Susquehanna Synod is putting together a group to discuss and send comments back to churchwide in September.

All these forms of uncovering the truth are all small glimpses into the Kingdom of God. They show us that the Kingdom of God is indeed being uncovered in our midst, uncovered in our world. God is at work in our world. God is with women like Bathsheba who experience violence. God is with those who suffer. God is with those who feel pain. And we know this truth because of God's ultimate act of uncovering the truth, Jesus Christ.

When Jesus walked this earth, the Gospels tell us that he aligned himself with unlikely characters – with sinners, women, the sick. Jesus sought to be in relationship with people who suffered, who were in pain, who were ostracized and oppressed by their society. And then, on the cross, Jesus himself suffered. On the cross, Jesus himself felt human pain. On the cross, Jesus himself was ostracized and oppressed by human powers. This tells us that God is with all who suffer, all who feel pain, and all who are oppressed because our God has experienced it.

This story from 2 Samuel may be about a coverup, but we must remember that when humans try to cover things up, God is in the business of uncovering. God sent Jesus into

this world to be God's hands and feet. God sent Jesus into this world to break through sin. God sent Jesus into this world to uncover the truth – the truth that God seeks for all people to experience love, grace, and healing, the truth that God is with us through all suffering and pain, the truth that God is far more powerful than any human coverup. Amen.

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