

PENTECOST 9B 25-07-2021 The Reverend Lorna Green

2 Samuel 11.1-15; Ps 14; Ephesians 3.14-21; John 6.1-21

From 2 Samuel 11

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, 'This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.' So David sent messengers to fetch her, and she came to him, and he lay with her.Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, 'I am pregnant.' So David sent word to Joab, 'Send me Uriah the Hittite.'..... David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house. In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, 'Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die.'

Ephesians 3.14-21

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

I'm glad the children are in the hall enjoying Godly Play and not with us because today's reading from the Old Testament is an X-rated, adults only story that is definitely not suitable for children.

Over the past few Sundays we have been hearing about the first of Israel's kings: Saul, who displeased God, went mad, and was killed in battle, and then David, the shepherd boy who went up in the world.

We've heard that David was a handsome warrior who fought off the country's enemies. He was a poet and a musician; there was that relationship with Jonathon, but then he had a swag of wives and a multitude of children.

He apparently had the opportunity to murder Saul a couple of times, but didn't, and is described as a God-fearing, God-loving man.

Then there is this episode, in which we see another side of our hero. Instead of leading his soldiers into battle David stayed home in Jerusalem; and following his afternoon nap he had a stroll on the palace roof. From that lofty position he could see into the courtyards of the houses below- and he saw a woman having a bath.

Now if he'd been the gentleman he should have been, he would have turned away; maybe gone indoors and written a psalm or two. Instead he had a good long look and spied on the woman, who we are told was purifying herself according to the law.

David asked a servant who this beautiful lady was and was told that she was from a good family and married to one of his best soldiers. That should have been the end of it- but it wasn't.

The narrator baldly states that David 'sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her.' In the past, some have tried to put the blame on Bathsheba, painting her as a temptress who committed adultery with the king; but David is responsible. He sent his soldiers to take her- she could hardly refuse, and neither could they; and he raped her.

David collected women like some men collect tools for the shed, to be used when wanted. Before Bathsheba he already had six or seven wives; and that doesn't include servants, slaves or prostitutes with whom Israelite men could have sex without consequence.

When Bathsheba discovered her pregnancy she had to send a message to tell David; her husband Uriah was away, fighting for his king. David conspired to get Uriah back, telling him to go home and sleep with his wife- so that Uriah would be presumed to be the father.

Uriah refused, claiming it would be wrong to do so while his fellow soldiers were camping near the battlefield. Maybe he knew what had happened- we don't know. If he **did** know that the king had slept with his wife, this was his only avenue of resistance: David had all the power. Poor Uriah was doomed. Next Sunday the story continues and we will hear the consequences of David's behaviour. He alone is held accountable by God- but Bathsheba suffers greatly.

This unsavoury story is told with David as its focus; Bathsheba is merely a character in his story, used to show how low he sinks, how penitent he becomes and how much God loves and forgives him. The narrator is not interested in Bathsheba's experience and does not identify her rape as a crime or a sin against her. We can imagine how this situation might play out in court today. I can picture Bathsheba being cross examined: "What were you doing, bathing outside, flaunting your body? Did you say 'no' at any time? Why not?"

We in Australia today do not have absolute rulers with power to do whatever they like to anybody as they please. But there are plenty of people who use and misuse the power they have to control, to hurt, or to sexually abuse others- children, women, and men. And all too often they get away with it.

Contrast this misuse of power, this violence and manipulation, with the way Jesus used his power. In today's gospel we heard how he fed five thousand hungry people; we have been hearing, Sunday by Sunday, about his travels through towns and villages as he healed the sick and told people the Good News. On that same day Jesus walked across the lake to the boat carrying his disciples, terrifying them- and then saying, "It is I- do not be afraid."

Jesus had power over nature, he had power over sickness, he even had power over death, but at no time did he ever even come close to misusing his power.

In the letter to the Ephesians the writer- who may or may not have been Paul- wrote about power. He prayed that followers of Jesus would be strengthened with the power of the Spirit to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge; and he gives glory to God who is able to accomplish more than we can dream of 'by the power at work within us'- the Holy Spirit.

It is God's Spirit who urges and empowers us to reach out to the world in loving service.

When people who identify as Christians use Scripture- or their particular interpretation of Scripture- to justify discrimination against other people, that cannot be of God.

When they claim scriptural support for 'male headship' or refuse to allow women to minister as God has called them- I do not believe that is of the Spirit. And when they promote so-called 'conversion therapy' for LGBTQI+ people who are already vulnerable, causing untold suffering- I do not believe that is the way of Jesus.

The way of Jesus is the way of radical acceptance, equality, and non-violence. In David's world and at the time Jesus walked the Earth this Way was like a dream. In today's world it seems almost as far off; but the Holy Spirit is working in us to change **us** so that we can change the world. We can make a difference.

The Lord be with you.