

**10 Pentecost
July 29, 2018**

**In the name of the God of all Creation;
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus;
And the power of God known in the Spirit.
Amen.**

*Now, I've heard there was a secret chord
That David played, and it pleased the Lord
But you don't really care for music, do you?
It goes like this, the fourth, the fifth
The minor fall, the major lift
The baffled king composing hallelujah*

Those are the opening words of Leonard Cohen's song "Hallelujah!" In many ways this song has become iconic ... the tune sung with a whole slew of different lyrics at weddings, and funerals, anniversaries, and other special occasions. However, the original song is about King David ... the David who we have been hearing about all summer in the readings from Hebrew Scripture.

David ... the shepherd boy, who slew Goliath with a single fling of a smooth stone. David ... the psalmist who supposedly wrote his own songs and played a harp to accompany them. David ... who rose to become a mighty warrior, commander of armies, and finally king over Israel. David ... who in today's reading was at home in his palace lounging around while his next door neighbor, Uriah the Hittite, was leading David's army in battle.

*Your faith was strong but you needed proof
You saw her bathing on the roof
Her beauty and the moonlight overthrew ya
She tied you to a kitchen chair
She broke your throne, and she cut your hair
And from your lips she drew the hallelujah*

David looked over the rooftop wall of his palace and noticed a beautiful woman bathing on the rooftop below his. He summoned his servants to fetch her ... they "lay together" ... and then she went home. Sometime later she sends word to David that she was pregnant.

Am I the only one who finds this story a little fishy? Uriah the Hittite is an officer in David's army, and he lived right next door to the palace. The story makes it seem that David's sighting of Bathsheba bathing was his very first awareness of her existence. Somehow, I find that hard to believe. I wonder if David may have seen Bathsheba many times before, became smitten with her, and then sent Uriah into battle just to have an opportunity to seduce her while her husband was away.

And Bathsheba? I wonder if she is totally innocent in all this. If David's sighting of Bathsheba from his rooftop was his first, was it one that was planned by Bathsheba? She knew well that her next door neighbor was King David and that he was at home while her husband was away fighting the war with the Ammonites.

These lurid questions are the making of tabloid headlines in the checkout lanes at Publix. It sounds all too much like the affairs of public figures in every age, including our own. Yet the fact of the matter is that the questions raised in the story of David and Bathsheba are not just fodder for sensational speculation ... these questions are also ones scholars of Hebrew lore take very seriously.

Was this a romance initiated by David's lust? Or, is this a story of a coy woman's manipulation for the sake of power? The fact of the matter is that this is one of those stories that can be read many, many ways ... and they may all be true.

*You say I took the name in vain
I don't even know the name
But if I did, well really, what's it to you?
There's a blaze of light in every word
It doesn't matter which you heard
The holy or the broken hallelujah*

Just to flesh out the story ... no pun intended ... when David gets word that Bathsheba is pregnant a cover up ensues. He calls Bathsheba's husband and David's officer, Uriah, home from the front lines so that he might "lay" with Bathsheba and then Uriah would believe that the child was his. However, Uriah is a man of honor, and while his troops are fighting the war he chose to refrain from those activities his men are deprived of ... including sex with his wife. David even tried to get Uriah drunk so that his inhibitions might be lowered and he would succumb to the beauty of his wife Bathsheba. But, even that didn't work. So he resorted to a final solution ... he sent word to his general Boaz ... by way of the innocent Uriah ... to send Uriah into battle ... and then withdraw the soldiers around him so that Uriah would be killed by the enemy.

This is where our reading ends this morning, but like a good novel it leaves us hanging for the beginning of the next chapter. In next week's reading we will hear that after an appropriate time of grieving, Bathsheba and David marry. But remember, David already has other wives, and a consort of concubines as well. And, the charming and charmed wonder boy of Israel has tarnished his image, and the repercussions of his acts bring cracks to his household.

Those cracks begin when the prophet Nathan confronted King David by telling him a parable ... a parable that snares David in his own words to hold him accountable for his actions. When David acknowledged to himself that what he has done was wrong, he hung his head in shame. "I have sinned against the Lord," he says, and David lived with the guilt and a broken household until his death. The consequences of his actions are tragic. When Bathsheba gave birth to her

son conceived in adultery, the child only lived for a few days. Then David's adult son Absalom, by his wife Haggith, is killed when the mule he is riding in retreat from a battle runs under a low hanging tree and Absalom's neck is caught in a forked branch.

Another of David's sons, Adonijah [A-DON-I-JAH], by his wife Michal, is the rightful heir to the throne. However, on David's deathbed Bathsheba pleads with David to renounce Adonijah [A-DON-I-JAH] and proclaim Bathsheba's second son, Solomon, the king upon David's death. Solomon and Adonijah [A-DON-I-JAH] remain mortal enemies until Solomon order him killed. That is why the sanctuary in Jerusalem is known as Solomon's Temple and not Adonijah's [A-DON-I-JAH] Temple.

*I did my best, it wasn't much
I couldn't feel, so I tried to touch
I've told the truth, I didn't come to fool you
And even though it all went wrong
I'll stand before the lord of song
With nothing on my tongue but hallelujah*

So, what are we to make of this story? Surely it was included in the Hebrew Scriptures to make a point and not just to recall the sordid details of David's failings. This King David is the epitome of historical heroes for the people of Israel. The gospels claim that Jesus was a descendant of David ... a descendant of King David the scoundrel. Why include this story that can only be seen as something that dishonors David's name?

This, like so many other stories in our Holy Scriptures, is about human flaws and foibles, and the redemptive power of God. Abraham was a liar. Rebekah was manipulative. Jacob defrauded his father Isaac and his brother Esau. Moses killed one of the Pharaoh's guards. Ruth and Naomi tricked Boaz into sleeping with Ruth. Jonah ran away from God's call and then complained about God's mercy to the pagan Ninevites. Peter proclaimed that he would never deny Jesus, but then did so three times. All the disciples did the same thing. Paul lamented that he was the least of all the apostles for his persecution of the church, and he lived with a "thorn in his side." All these bible stories are about human failings. But, more importantly, they are about God's redemptive power.

First and foremost, I believe this story of David and Bathsheba is about God's redemption. And, if King David can be redeemed by God than there is hope for you and for me. All the "what ifs" in the story make it intriguing. That it is also a story about sex and power and murder also makes it juicy. Yet, in the end, it is really about David betraying a trust and failing to live up to what God wanted for him. The Prophet Nathan acted as a mirror to David, and he saw himself and his failings, and he was ashamed. He could undo what he had already done, and he had to live with the consequences, but David was a different man ... and he knew God's redemption.

It is not whether this story was true ... or how it is true. The question is: How do we know this story to be true in the world around us, and in our own lives? Who of us has not fallen short of

living into the fullness of the image of God in which we were made? Who of us has not seen our failings and changed our lives ... and known God's redemptive love?

The story happens over and over again. And when it happens to people of power and visibility we see it all over the news. Sometimes we just need to be thankful that our failings are not as juicy, and our lives are not as public. However, God's redemptive love is there nonetheless ... to act as a mirror for our actions ... to encourage us to turn around ... to have the strength to accept the consequences ... and then to re-enter our lives living into that image to which God has called us to.

The questions I raise about the story of David and Bathsheba are just a tiny glimpse of the many possibilities of what is written between the lines. Scholars and playwrights ... and song writers ... all have embellished the tale in many directions ... all the different ways that human beings like you and me might find the story acted out in our lives and the lives of those around us. But in the end this isn't really a story about David and Bathsheba ... it is a story about God. It isn't just a story about sex and power ... it is a story about failing to live into God's image to which we are called. And it isn't just about the tragedy of living in failure and all its consequences ... it is a story about God's loving redemption that calls us back to a new life ... a new life that is changed by our prior foolishness into one of wisdom and faithfulness.

*I did my best, it wasn't much
I couldn't feel, so I tried to touch
I've told the truth, I didn't come to fool you
And even though it all went wrong
I'll stand before the lord of song
With nothing on my tongue but hallelujah*

If God's loving redemption is available to King David and his bride Bathsheba ... then it certainly is available for you and me.

Hallelujah!

Amen.

NOTE: Leonard Cohen wrote over 80 verses to "Hallelujah" and chose different verses in different performances and recordings. These four verses are considered the core of the song/poem. The song has been covered (sung and recorded by others) over 300 times with many of the lyrics being rewritten and new verses added. Here is what usually is found in a search for the lyrics on the web:

Hallelujah

Now, I've heard there was a secret chord
That David played, and it pleased the Lord
But you don't really care for music, do you?
It goes like this, the fourth, the fifth
The minor fall, the major lift
The baffled king composing hallelujah
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Hallelujah
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Your faith was strong but you needed proof
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I did my best, it wasn't much
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Songwriter: Leonard Cohen
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