St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church

Proper 13

[2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp13_RCL.html#ot1)[Psalm 51:1-13](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp13_RCL.html#ps1)[Ephesians 4:1-16](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp13_RCL.html#nt1)[John 6:24-35](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp13_RCL.html#gsp1)

Long, Hot Summer

It’s a long, hot summer, and what other time seems as fitting for us to be viewing the long, hot and, may I say, steamy side of David’s story one summer long ago. I’m pretty sure it must have been summer in Jerusalem, because a Jerusalem winter can drop to about 55 degrees F. or lower. Every once in a while, it snows during a Jerusalem winter, and in January and February it’s known to rain a lot, so I’m pretty sure Bathsheba wouldn’t be sunbathing around that time of year. It is much more likely that David’s unfortunate fall from grace began during a long, hot summer. As the summer wore on, things just went from bad to worse for David, and most of those around him. So if you are looking for a thrill-filled summer read, pull up your lounge chair, and your beverage of choice and settle into Samuel’s unfolding tale of shepherd boy made king, and his fall from glory. A story of sin and redemption, loss and reclamation, which was written down somewhere around a thousand years before Christ was born, proving a point that humankind is a very slow learner because it is very clear that some things just never change.

Two weeks ago, we heard all about David’s murderous act against one of his most loyal soldiers, Uriah, husband of the beautiful Bathsheba. His plot against Uriah successfully carried out, he takes Bathsheba as his own wife and she bears him a son. David probably thought he would live out the rest of his story, as he had so far, according to his own desires and ambition. Yet, like many a sinner, 3,000 years ago, or today, whether one’s sin be great or small, somehow what one thinks might be the end of the story, is usually just the beginning of what we might call, the comeuppance for the prime suspect of the story, the antagonist we want brought to justice. In all of the novels we read, movies or television mystery dramas we watch, we all wait for the moment of denouement, when all the strands of the story are brought together, and the guilty party of the story is found out and made to face the music of his own villainous orchestration.

The Prophet Samuel, author of David’s story, satisfies our desire to see David get his just deserts for his dastardly act.

David has built his career and rise to glory on defeating enemies of many kinds and in many situations. He has fought for what he felt was right in defending Israel from her enemies, for working always toward the unification of his new nation focusing his continual effort on creating Jerusalem as the capital, the center of all the political, social and religious life of Israel. All these battles, led to greater and greater glory for David. But now, he has entered into a different kind of battle and met a different kind of enemy. This enemy does not lie far away, outside his palace walls. It comes to David to confront him face to face, as if looking into a mirror at himself. It comes through a messenger from God, who points to the enemy who is David, himself. David is revealed as being his own worst enemy, capable of destroying every single thing that he has built up over the years. David is brought by God to face the enemy within. Himself.

Nathan was a prophet of the Lord, who knew David very well, and was sent to David to reveal God’s awareness and anger at David’s actions after all the blessings that God had bestowed upon him. He tells David a story of a rich man and a poor man, and the poor man’s little pet ewe lamb, slain to feed the rich man’s guests, because the rich man wanted to impress his visitors and didn’t want to give up own of his own lambs. Yet another miserable story of personal greed and heartlessness.

Interestingly, David is horrified by this heartlessness, and he reviles the rich man for his treatment of the poor man and for his cruelty to both the poor man and his lamb. Of course, in the moment of its telling, it never occurs to David that the story might be a metaphoric illustration of his own story of green and cruelty.

Nathan set him straight and David saw the light. David said with sudden realization, “I have sinned against the Lord.” “Well, yes David,” we can almost hear Nathan saying, “We are so pleased that you have figured that out. You killed Uriah, the poor man, and had the lamb, Bathsheba, delivered to you.”

However Nathan goes on to inform David, that although God has forgiven his sin, he needs to understand that the matter isn’t closed, and Nathan lays out the consequences just as God has instructed him to. Great trouble will come upon David, his family and his kingdom because……and here is one of the greatest phrases in the Hebrew Bible, “sin always brings death.” That phrase was a life-changing thing to hear for David, and it can be life-changing for all of us to hear, as well.

While David’s story reads like a summer novel, that last phrase brings home our own deviations from the Way, the Truth, and the Life at any time of year, which begs the question.

While our sins may not reach the act of murder of another body, what sins of the world do we see happening right in front of our eyes, from which we choose to look away?

What sins, committed by ourselves do we refuse to see, to admit, to confess?

In what ways are we unfaithful to God’s commandment to love and to whom are we unfaithful?

What spouses, lovers, friends, or even acquaintances we may not know very well, do we betray, and with whom do we break promised confidence?

To whom are we disloyal, whether we know all or nothing at all about that person?

Who is it that we stab in the back, cut down without their knowing of our disloyalty? Who are our Uriah’s? Uriah never knew of David’s unfeeling betrayal and was cut down without realizing or recognizing his murderer. In what ways do we put to death, smash lives, kill off and, like David, as we will learn, later live to regret our deeds?

These are hard questions, but worth our pondering.

David killed within and outside the land. He killed the enemy and the innocent. And having done so, he believes that life will continue on as if nothing out of the usual has happened.

Where around the world do we see our modern-day David’s, the ones who kill body or soul, and expect that nothing will change as a consequence of those killing actions.? Just look at your news feed today to find more than one answer to that question.

Who are the ones who think they can sin and, like David, think they can simply let time go by and forget all about it? An innocent child who has stolen some cookies from the cupboard might think this. But children grow up and learn through life’s experiences that the truth somehow always surfaces. And yet we grownups, deep down, still want to believe that, with childlike reasoning, our sins will never come to light and all will be well.

What David’s do we know who, when confronted by words of judgment, come out from an inner hiding place to admit and confess to guilt? Who and where are the Nathans of the world who speak truth to the authorities of the world, to national leaders, city mayors or parents, or spouses or partners? Who are the victims of the guilty? Who are the Uriah’s and the Bathsheba’s and all those near and dear to them?

And when we have sinned. Who was our Nathan, come to confront us with our sin, and absolve us in the name of God, and to lay out divine punishment which comes as almost a relief, a letting go of all the holding on to the sin we have had to endure? Perhaps, we all must ask ourselves how aware we are of these kinds of experiences and if we have learned from them in such a way that we know we will not pass that way again.

David’s punishment is not light. Nathan assures David that he will not die for his sins, but he will suffer consequences that will somehow make death seem a preferable option. David will suffer for his misdeeds and will have to face public shame upon himself and his family, his concubines and more. His ego, his pride, his sense of self worth will be destroyed to the extent that we will have to hear much more of the story to hear how David will rebuild. Today we simply hear David’s confession, but be assured there is more to the story, and as you find ways to escape this long, hot summer, one thought might be to read the rest of this Second Book of Samuel, to discover how David’s story unfolds. Then you will be able to decide for yourself. Just what is the end of anyone’s story? At what point does the last chapter of any story end? Is confession enough?

When does the chapter about forgiveness begin and how much of a long, hot summer will it take rediscover mercy and grace?

End.

Written to the Glory of God

E. J. R. Culver+

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