

The Bread of Life
St. Paul's UCC Church
August 1, 2021

Friends in Christ....

Our Old Testament lesson for today comes from 2 Samuel, chapter 11 where David is called out for his abuse of power, and our New Testament lesson comes from John chapter 6 where Jesus after feeding the 5,000, or the multitude, is followed by the crowd and he attempts to teach them that he is the true Bread of Life.

The 11th chapter of Second Samuel begins: "In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army." David was derelict in duty, and it got him in big trouble. His lust for Bathsheba was a gross abuse in power. Then the attempt to cover up his misdeeds only made things worse. We see in the news today how often the cover-up becomes worse than the original crime as it was for David. As we continue to read about David's life we find a dysfunctional family whose story is like a soap opera with little or no peace.

As a footnote, David already had at least six wives, and possibly seven. And, let me say that this is not about Bathsheba. She was doing what was required by the Laws of Moses. It is about David's behavior.

We hear God's reaction in today's text.

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13

David and Bathsheba

²⁶When Uriah's wife heard that her husband Uriah was dead, she mourned for her husband. ²⁷After the time of mourning was over, David sent for her and brought her back to his house. She became his wife and bore him a son. But what David had done was evil in the LORD's eyes.

Nathan pronounces God's judgment

12 So the LORD sent Nathan to David. When Nathan arrived he said, "There were two men in the same city, one rich, one poor. ²The rich man had a lot of sheep and cattle, ³but the poor man had nothing—just one small ewe lamb that he had bought. He raised that lamb, and it grew up with him and his children. It would eat from his food and drink from his cup—even sleep in his arms! It was like a daughter to him.

⁴“Now a traveler came to visit the rich man, but he wasn’t willing to take anything from his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had arrived. Instead, he took the poor man’s ewe lamb and prepared it for the visitor.”

⁵David got very angry at the man, and he said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the one who did this is demonic! ⁶He must restore the ewe lamb seven times over because he did this and because he had no compassion.”

⁷“You are that man!” Nathan told David. “This is what the LORD God of Israel says: I anointed you king over Israel and delivered you from Saul’s power. ⁸I gave your master’s house to you, and gave his wives into your embrace. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. If that was too little, I would have given even more. ⁹Why have you despised the LORD’s word by doing what is evil in his eyes? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and taken his wife as your own. You used the Ammonites to kill him. ¹⁰Because of that, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite as your own, the sword will never leave your own house.

¹¹“This is what the LORD says: I am making trouble come against you from inside your own family. Before your very eyes I will take your wives away and give them to your friend, and he will lay with your wives in broad daylight. ¹²You did what you did secretly, but I will do what I am doing before all Israel in the light of day.”

¹³“I have sinned against the LORD!” David said to Nathan.

“The LORD has removed your sin,” Nathan replied to David. “You will not die.

Before the prophet Nathan came knocking on the door nothing in this text indicates that David had any remorse for his evil deed. He acted as if nothing unusual had happened, and thought that he had gotten away with it.

Did you notice how the prophet Nathan approached David? He tells him a parable about a rich man, a poor man, and a little lamb. David strongly responds to the parable with seemingly no clue that he was the rich man. Then Nathan drops the hammer and says that you are the rich man. Then he goes on with a prophecy that there will be continuing trouble within his family. As one continues to read the story of David and his family, you will be surprised how many troubles come to it.

There is a large BUT to the rest of the story. In spite of David’s behavior, God made a promise that the Davidic line will continue. When one reads the

genealogies of Jesus in both Mathew and Luke, you will discover that Jesus is a descendent of David.

Abusive behavior has been going on forever and it continues today. Just think about how many stories we see in the news of abusiveness. Typically, it is a person of a superior status abusing someone of a lesser status. It happens all over, in government, in the work place, in the church, in schools, in the military, in sports, in society, and the list goes on. Bullying is a form of abusive behavior, and is widespread. God does not condone this type of behavior.

Even for what David had done, there is forgiveness after repentance. If David can be forgiven for what he had done, we know that we have forgiveness for our sins and shortcomings. Jesus going to the cross took away the penalties for our sins.

Now we turn to a text from the Gospel of John. Ahead of this selection from John, there is the story of the feeding of the 5,000 or the multitude. The story of the multitude is found in all four of the gospels. There are different details in each of the stories, but all are stories of a miracle, or as John writes “a sign.” Jesus leaves and the crowd follows him. From Chapter 6...

John 6:24-35

²⁴ When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. ²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

Bread of life

²⁶ Jesus replied, “I assure you that you are looking for me not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate all the food you wanted. ²⁷ Don’t work for the food that does not last but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. God the Father has confirmed him as his agent to give life.”

²⁸ They asked, “What must we do in order to accomplish what God requires?”

²⁹ Jesus replied, “This is what God requires, that you believe in him whom God sent.”

³⁰ They asked, “What miraculous sign will you do, that we can see and believe you? What will you do? ³¹ Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, just as it is written; *He gave them bread from heaven to eat.*”

³² Jesus told them, “I assure you, it wasn’t Moses who gave the bread from heaven to you, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ The bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴ They said, “Sir, give us this bread all the time!”

³⁵ Jesus replied, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

May God bless our hearing of his Holy Word? Amen.

Jesus and his disciples were on the eastern side of Lake Galilee for the miracle feeding. They next moved to the northwest corner of the Lake to Capernaum. And the crowd followed.

Poverty was widespread in Judea, perhaps as high as 90%. Given that the subsistence diet of which the first century peasant lived, it is easy to understand why they followed Jesus with the hope that he would provide bread for them to live on. They brought up the image from Exodus of the providing of manna in the wilderness. Jesus corrected them that it was God and not Moses who made the provision.

John presents the story of feeding the multitude as a sign as he does with miracles in his gospel. A sign is something that points to something else. The sign is not the important thing, but what it points to. Businesses pay for billboards, not so that people will be attracted to the billboard, but so that they might be directed to what it points to, whatever it is. We use signs when we are driving such highway numbers, speed limits, of upcoming road construction, and so on.

The feeding miracle, as a sign, needs to point to something else besides full bellies. We speak of hunger. Of course it can be physical, but it can also it can be a hunger for knowledge, or for wisdom, or for understanding. We work for food and we get money for our work. The hippies of the 1960s called money “bread.” Bread is perhaps our primary symbol for food, health, nourishment, and community. In the Lord’s Prayer we say “Give us this day our daily bread.” Bread is a sign for life and coming together. Around the Lord’s Table we break bread together.

One of the signs that it points to is Jesus as the way to fill our spiritual needs. Whether Christian or not, there is a need to fill one’s spirituality need. We believe that it is Jesus who does that for us. The bread that endues is the eternal life that each one of us has been promised.

We need food to live and we appreciate it. The crowds around Jesus on that long ago day as reported in John 6 were no different. They were hungry and Jesus fed them so he quickly rose in their estimation because of this miracle.

Just think. They had seen him perform many healing miracles. Now they see him feeding the multitude. If he was king, he could lead the people against Rome and defeat it so they could have a free county again and his army would never be reduced in number. But that was not his message. He taught people to love one another. He was the Bread of Life. He attends to spiritual needs and leaves it up to us to take care of the physical needs of others.

Before the pandemic, when my schedule allowed it, I would help at a monthly mobile food pantry. There are seven towns that it rotates around. They are Odebolt, Kiron, Arthur, Ida Grove, Battle Creek, Galva, and Holstein. To see the expressions of gratitude from the people getting baskets of food was heartwarming. Food security is a struggle for some. People can make a difference in the lives of other.

Another example: Des Moines is the home of the World Food Prize. It was established by Dr. Norman Borlaug to recognize and honor individuals that improved food security and is awarded annually, first in 1987. Dr. Borlaug was born and raised in Decorah, and had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for a lifetime of work to feed the world.

From the World Food Prize website regarding Dr. Borlaug: “In 1944, Dr. Borlaug participated in the Rockefeller Foundation's pioneering technical assistance program in Mexico, where he was a research scientist in charge of wheat improvement. For the next sixteen years, he worked to solve a series of wheat production problems that were limiting wheat cultivation in Mexico and to help train a whole generation of young Mexican scientists.

The work in Mexico not only had a profound impact on Dr. Borlaug's life and philosophy of agriculture research and development, but also on agricultural production, first in Mexico and later in many parts of the world.

It was on the research stations and farmers' fields of Mexico that Dr. Borlaug developed successive generations of wheat varieties with broad and stable disease resistance, broad adaptation to growing conditions across many degrees of latitude, and with exceedingly high yield potential.

These new wheat varieties and improved crop management practices transformed agricultural production in Mexico during the 1940's and 1950's and

later in Asia and Latin America, sparking what today is known as the "Green Revolution." Because of his achievements to prevent hunger, famine and misery around the world, it is said that Dr. Borlaug has "saved more lives than any other person who has ever lived."

Since 1987, there is an impressive list of Laureates that have a distinguished record of improving food security in a variety of ways to help feed a hungry world. I was fortunate to attend two or three of the ceremonies, and hear firsthand these inspiring stories. Yet, there is way too much hunger in the world, but much less than it would have otherwise been without these Laureates and other researchers. Compared to many, we are blessed with abundant food.

God uses us to make a difference.

Thanks be to God. Amen.