

Sermon for 25 July 2021 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: 2 Samuel 11:1-15; Psalm 14 (746UMH); Ephesians 3:14-21 ; John 6:1-21

“More of the same”

Last Sunday we saw through the word “power” a little bit.

King David thought it was time for him to build God a house, a temple.

By the time we got through thinking about that idea, we decided ... with the Bible ... that trying to “house” God came dangerously close to trying to control God, no matter how generous or modest or careful we try to be.

I summed up by using the example of my Dad carrying me upstairs when he got back from some nighttime activity and found me asleep downstairs with my Grandmother. Power was the magic between his practical caring for me, and the total, unconscious trust I showed by never waking up until the next morning. That is the only power, and it is everywhere, and it is reciprocal ... the love of God goes, and comes, and nothing overcomes it, and only seeing and being in that circle counts, ever.

Every other kind of power cheapens and confuses all relations, between people, and between us and nature, everything. Every other kind of power tries to run things, and get ahead of the mystery and purpose of all things, God ... the Truth ... what makes us free, real life ... the upward way, as the hymn says.

Today I use a title that follows through on this with the next King David story, the David and Bathsheba movie we old folks grew up with, Susan Hayward and all.

I call it “More of the same.” David’s been king awhile. He’s got power as we generally see it, and he uses it as we generally do ... to get his way, to follow his desire, to stay safe and keep things smooth.

The Bible, and the Church, are pretty good at spotting that kind of behavior and calling it what it is. In today’s case, Psalm 14 goes right to the heart of the matter, and says, “Fools say in their hearts, ‘There is no God.’”

That’s good. That’s right. That’s what we want to hear in church.

The trouble is, that’s “more of the same,” like my sermon title says. That’s what’s in the news, every day.

And it’s so darned timely that hurts. You’ve perhaps heard the quote by Karl Barth, the Swiss preacher who helped the German church resist Hitler and the Nazis: “Christians come to church to make their last stand against God.”

Of course sin is wrong. Of course I love Jesus. Of course we're on the upward way ... aren't we?

What makes it so bad ... and so good, ultimately ... is that God is in everything, everywhere, prizing out the truth and making it possible to see and to follow, even if it means we lose everything, even if we die ... and most especially, if we learn a little more than we knew when we last fell asleep, downstairs with the loving old folks who stay home taking care of us ... if we learn a little more about loving the Source of everything, about following God and allowing God to love us.

Paul says it to the little Ephesian fellowship that's just beginning to live in the kingdom way, Gentiles and Hebrews and all sorts of Duke's mixtures still struggling to be good, and be good to one another: "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."

And that's what John's writers' group goes on to tell us, as the last of the four Gospels to be written, we think about 100 A.D. John's church says what comes naturally to real believers: They feed one another with what they have, and no one goes hungry ... and when the waves rise and the wind blows and they are terrified, Jesus comes to them, and says to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." And as we read in John's church's words, "Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going."

It's just so timely. Right now, when we are shaking loose from terror and isolation; when we are wanting to get right with God in the boat and get moving again; when we are seeing more pain and failure in our past, and more breaks and cracks and temptation in our whole pattern of life than we knew or told each other about before ... right now, we have the bread to feed one another. Someone is speaking the truth, and we are hearing the Word: The kingdom of God is near John's group even insists, It is among you, among us ... and we have seen the Lord and heard as he has spoken our name, and we have no excuse. Nothing but the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord is true for us. Come, Lord Jesus!

Amen.