

**March 17-18, 2018**

## **#MeToo**

**Dr. Keith D. Herron, Senior Minister**

**St. Lucas UCC, St. Louis MO**

**The Fifth Sunday of Lent**

**Psalm 51:1-12, 2 Samuel 11:2-5**

**Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33**

### **For Emilie**

Shortly after both Wanda and I had completed grad school, a road house (a honky tonk) just down the road from where we were living put up one of those lighted mobile signs with the plastic letters advertising the bar as "the home for unwed fathers." In a county over-populated by pick-ups and high school dropouts working in the offshore oil industry, this served as clear messaging of what passed as dating advice to the men in this part of our state.

From then to now, sexual norms have shifted as an amazing number of powerful men (& a handful of women) in politics and in business and entertainment fields have been called out for their sins. It's one thing when one woman cries foul, but when dozens of women are naming the same guy as the one who harassed them, there's little a strongly voiced pious denial will do to shield them from public censure. The boys' club is getting smaller and smaller and the cocky male behavior is giving way to a time when women are asserting their voices and their power in the #MeToo movement.

Maybe it's enough to know there have been seismic changes going on, maybe as powerful as we saw these past few weeks as students marched against the easy access of guns in our society and who observed 17 minutes of silence for those students killed in Florida. These are 2 powerful public revolutions going on that are threatening the old norms.

The shadow of the #MeToo movement is wide in identifying abusive sexual practices of men who troll women and even women who cull out men who work in subservient roles in relationship to these powerful leaders. This movement is a public conversation that has exploded by holding perpetrators responsible and challenging the cycle. Sexual abuse is not limited to out-of-control bosses but to teachers and coaches and others who have access to young boys and young girls, vulnerable teenagers, and students especially since certain federal Title IX sexual misconduct guidelines were recently weakened by the President.

The story of David and Bathsheba is a sordid story built upon a series of lies. One lie is told and then is supported by more lies. That's the way it is with lies. One lie is never enough. One lie spawns off a series of other lies to cover the first one. Walter Brueggemann says it's the verbs that give this story away: David *arose* and *walked* and *saw* (and oh by the way, doesn't the Bible make an obvious point to tell us she was beautiful?), he *sent*, he *inquired*, he *sent*, he *took*, he *lay*, and she

returned.<sup>1</sup> There's no mention anywhere of Bathsheba's feelings because they don't matter. She's no more than property and King David takes what belongs to Uriah because he is the king and he has the almighty power to do so.

The need for *The National Enquirer* was established that day. The paparazzi took incriminating photographs with telephoto lenses and the pictures of Bathsheba were plastered all over town. Her beauty helped the sales reach record-setting numbers. Faithful Uriah returned at the King's bidding and slept on the King's doorstep out of loyalty, with more pictures. Later, a war journalist snapped a picture of his dead body on the battlefield. "Shot in the Back," the headline screamed in bold print.

Bathsheba took a bath on the rooftop as a part of her monthly ceremonial purification from her menstrual cycle. She was innocent and versions of the story that are told in order to implicate her as a seductress are proof that men have been the interpreters of the story and how it is told. The reason for her bath was simply the Bible's way of telling us that Bathsheba was at the height of her biological fruitfulness to conceive.

King David gave in to his broken self that needed her to satisfy him. Sex was the language he used to speak of deeper issues of a broken interior life. He built truth around a lie and set in motion a whole series of other lies in order to protect his fragile self.

Psalms 51 is the poetry of pain and the poet begs for God's forgiveness and restitution because the psalmist has been caught in the web of his lies and there's no place to hide. Not from his friends because they all knew. Not from his countrymen because the psalmist had been the center of all the rumors for weeks. Not from his wife because she knew even though no one has the heart to talk to her about it. Most assuredly not from God who knows all our secrets no matter how hard we try to hide them. The poetry is in the pain, something that oozes from the very pores of the psalm.

Maybe a lesson we learned as children is that our sins must be carefully managed. Most children resort to lying. "I didn't steal that!" we say as if innocence was our strongest virtue. The first lie requires another lie be told in order to keep the first lie in place. The problem with this response is that it's a short-lived strategy. Once any one of the lies begin to unravel, no amount of further lying can help. When one lie goes sour the whole batch goes bad. There is nothing more purifying than the light of day.

The study of infidelity among women and men of power helps us understand that the lust is not driven purely by the sexual fulfillment but is carried along on the currents of fatigue, insecurity and low self-esteem. There is a self-soothing, self-serving need that is met that can be measured along the fault lines of the broken interior life of the man who seeks to conquer women or vice versa as we should not conclude this is only an issue with men.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *David's Truth*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985

In the end, Nathan the prophet boldly took the misbehaving King aside like the parent the King needed in that moment and told him a simple story of gross injustice. And the King took it like a child. Immediately the story pierced all the defenses of his lies and he melted in contrition.

The problem with sin, Augustine says, is "sin is the punishment for sin." When the facts came out in the light of day, King David was reduced from the heights of power where he felt invincible from the weak and powerless and he himself learned he was powerless and destitute and morally bankrupt.

It's in that moment that David launched himself upon the truth of God's forgiveness exhausted from all the efforts expelled in keeping his sins as secrets. What he discovered was God's steadfast love and abundant mercy. We learn from all this is that we can go to God to confess all our lies and discover there's a larger truth than our lies. We discover God's truth is large enough to cover all our sins.

Only then can we utter the words of David the poet of pain: *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin"* (Psalm 51:1-2, NRSV).

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