

“Salvation Re-imagined”
2 Samuel 11:1-25
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17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 26, 2009

As a boy, David had imagined himself here, at the pinnacle of success. The long days of sheep work are over.

- No more risky slingshot duty,
- No more nights of fending off lions.
- No more days of shoveling sheep stool.
- No more dreaming about the big house, the royal bling, the easy life.

No, David has moved into the big house, into the top slot of upper management with more than enough stock options and assets to keep him protected from the fears that most of us face. David has moved into the place where men and women come at his beck and call to do the shoveling, the fending, and risking for him.

So, today, even though most kings like David are out in the fields of war, David is relaxing on the couch, watching a little ESPN, flipping through the newspaper, catching up on the latest news from the war front. Sure, there is work to be done, but for David, that work involves moving the right people to the right places, like pawns on a chess board. And there’s no reason why that management can’t take place in the comfort of the Presidential suite, Blackberry in hand, wet bar over to one side, royal dancers not too far from sight, and a veranda view of the city laid out before him. Ah, this is the life!! *And David certainly intends to enjoy it.*

And why shouldn’t he? The road to the top has been a long, difficult one, full of battles, assassination attempts, and the loss of people he loves. Along the way, David has felt the insecurity of employment like some of us. He has known the anxiety of swinging markets like some of us. He has longed for stability just like some of us.

You can’t blame David for taking some time to enjoy the fruits of his labors. To enjoy what it feels like not to worry about how to pay the bills, save for his kids’ college education, and have enough to put away for retirement. Not to have to worry about whether your job will still be there when you wake up tomorrow. Not to have to worry about your future. To enjoy the security that many of us can only imagine.

And how easy, how logical it must be for David to feel that he *deserves* this time.
 That he *deserves* this power.
 That he *deserves* this privilege.

So easy, that the power and the privilege and the time quickly becomes normal to David. *Sending* for cabinet leaders, *taking* small rogue states, *commanding* the armed forces, and *ruling* all the people becomes regular, commonplace, ordinary.

So when David, most likely bored from lying around all day on the couch spies “that woman” bathing on the roof – I don’t see any *moment* of ethical decision. I don’t see any wrestling of the conscience. There’s no ethical decision to be made when that woman is, to David, just another object to be sent for, to be taken, to be commanded, to be ruled over – just another thing that he deserves. There’s no regret when David launches a cover-up to hide his deed. There’s no remorse when David’s hands are stained with the blood of Uriah. “Do not let this matter trouble you,” he says to his troubled underlings, “for the sword devours now one and now another.”

David has become so accustomed to the lifestyle, the privilege, and the power that all of these things – the taking of what he wants, the using and abusing of people in his city, and even the killing have become just *the way things are*. And when authority, and privilege, and power become nothing more than “*the way things are*,” there is no sin to be confessed, there is no guilt to be assuaged, there is no evil to be rejected – there is only the numbing, reassuring mantra: *that’s just the way things are*.

You don’t have to be the king of a people, or the governor of a state, or the President of a nation to find yourself in David’s shoes. Power and privilege nibble away at each of us, injecting their venom into our view of the world, slowly numbing us to the horror, the absurdity, the incongruity of the world around us.

I see it in our city when we become numb to children gunned down in our streets satisfied that they are not our own.

I see it in our nation of “government by the people” when we cynically say to each other, we can’t govern well together.

I see it in our churches when we critique from the comfort of our couches, dismissing the church as a dying breed poisoned by hypocrisy and homophobia as if our resignation could do anything about either.

I see it in our congregation when we settle for silence when we disagree or separation when we don’t get what we need.

I see it sometimes in your lives and in mine when we steal food from our emaciated dreams to fatten up our greedy, bloated things.

We cling to what we own, we chase after status and stuff, we insulate ourselves from the pain of the world ignoring God’s counsel to us, until we are numb to needs around and within us. We invest ourselves so deeply in the seductions of our world until we are no longer shocked by the victims lying in its wake. Until this way of living seems little more than *the way things are*.

It might not have been this way for David, had he been able to identify with one of the victims of his royal power. If he had rested long enough from the *taking* of what he desired, the *planning* of the coverup, and the *commanding* of his victims long enough to see his world from a different vantage point. Perhaps if he had looked through the eyes of *Bathsheba*, and imagined the hell that he was creating for her, instead of sending for, and taking, and lying with “that woman.” Or if he had allowed the integrity of Uriah to turn him around. Uriah - the one who resisted participation in David’s coverup. –who

would not eat or drink or lie with his wife while the ark and the people of Israel remained in harms way.

Or if he had imagined God's vantage – David, my beloved, I made you king to heal my people not to harm them. I gave you commandments not to prevent you from becoming the person you long to be, but to protect you from settling for what you are not. It might not have been this way for David had he identified with one of the victims of his royal power.

And it doesn't have to be this way for us, either. *We* can imagine this tale through the eyes of those harmed by power. That's probably why this scandalous story is here. So we can imagine how Bathsheba suffered, so we can imagine how Uriah fell. So we can imagine just how deeply God was grieved by harmful power that was given to heal.

We can identify with David's victims, and we don't have to stop there. We can imagine, centuries later, how a mother felt desperately trying to protect herself from King Herod slaughtering the newborns. We can imagine how a child felt pushed away from Jesus by a disciple. We can imagine bleeding on the cross, suffering at its foot, or grieving at the tomb.

But we don't have to stop there. We can imagine trying to survive with drug dealers on my corner. We can imagine running up debt trying to pay for my children's medical bills. We can imagine being told that we're not whole in God's eyes unless we're straight, or liberal, or professional, or we are the same as whoever's making the declarations.

But we don't have to stop there. We can imagine what it feels like in the church not to feel listened to, not to feel heard, not to be known, not to be loved. We can imagine ourselves through the eyes of those who are harmed by power until a whole community of imaginers is born.

A community that knows the way things are is not the way things have to be. The world has enough food to go around. The city has enough hands to raise our children. The church has enough grace to abide with each other. We have already been gifted with grace and love and hope and healing together - everything that we need to be whole right here in cleansing water, broken bread, in tears that are sung away together.

And I'm too young to know from personal experience if rejecting the good life promised by Wal-Mart, and Citygroup, and by the Davidic culture of ladder climbing, leads to more pain than pleasure. I'm too young to know from personal experience if imagining the poor filled instead of your own pockets leads to more loss than gain. I'm too young to know if imagining a community that is secure rather than my own life leads to more heartache than security. By the time I've gained that experience it will be too late to live life over again. I'm old enough to know there's nothing romantic about living in God's community. Even the shiniest stone will lose its sheen in harsh weather. Sometimes, like David, I find myself lying on the couch dreaming about filling my storehouses with things and people that I can control.

But when the singing starts on a Sunday morning and we tell each other again that the hearts that beat inside of our chests are temporary gifts to propel us into God's world.

And we tell each other that God don't make no junk, that you were made to be a blessing. We imagine ourselves making hard choices, taking foolish risks, holding onto faith that must be believed before it can be seen through the eyes of Abraham and Sarah, of Deborah and Moses, of Joshua and Rahab, of David and Esther, of Joseph and Mary, of Jesus and his disciples, of Susannah and Paul – we hear of their choices and the grace of God that enabled them to imagine a world beyond the one they had inherited, to receive a life that too many give up on too early, then I know that this community that sometimes leaves you and me wounded, hurting, angry, or excluded, is also what is saving me, not tomorrow, not when I die, no – right now.