

David and Bathsheba || 2 Samuel 12:1-15
Rev. Drew Hanson || October 21, 2018

Introduction - Buggy

Over the last month or so, we've been having this book study on Wednesday nights. We gather at the same time as the children's choir, so it's been a fun multi-generational ministry time. The book itself is called *Tattoos on the Heart*, written by a Jesuit priest named Greg Boyle who started Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles. Homeboy Industries seeks to employ gang members and parolees so that they can have the hope of a future that their past had taken away. As you can imagine, working with gang members in Los Angeles would be difficult and trying, but the author is such a joyful person that he takes these difficulties and twists them to present to us more humorous misadventures with lessons tied to them than difficulties.

One such story happened in the chapter we discussed this week. There's a young man named Jaime, who goes by Buggy on the street. He's in his early twenties and he's in and out of jail, and Boyle says that everytime he leaves jail he predictably comes by his office looking for some help. This time, Buggy comes in looking for shoes, as his are worn out. Boyle says, alright, I'll buy you some shoes, but you have to answer a question correctly. Before I ask the question, I'm going to set the scene.

Boyle tells Buggy that one day at Homeboy Industries, there was a collect call. This usually meant a call from a jail, and they

always answer those calls. So a 16-year-old receptionist named Manuel answers the phone, “How may I help you?” The caller is a 20-year-old young man from a rival neighborhood of Manuel’s, making the caller and Manuel enemies. The caller growls into the phone “WHO’S THIS??” Now, Manuel goes by Lucky on the street, but because he doesn’t want the conversation to escalate, he calmly says “Manuel.”

This makes the caller even angrier, so he tries to get the information he really wants out of him and says, “WHERE YOU FROM?” In other words, the caller is asking which neighborhood Manuel comes from so he knows if he’s a foe or not. Manuel calmly says, “Please hold,” asks another receptionist to take the call, and transfers the caller to her.

So Boyle says to Bugsy, ok, that’s the scene, here’s the question. Who was the *real* man, the 20-year-old or the 16-year-old. And Bugsy says, that’s easy, the 16-year-old. Boyle asks, “why?” and Bugsy responds, “Cuz the 16-year-old didn’t play around with any of the little-kid stuff, the gang stuff.”

Boyle says to Bugsy, “Very good. I’ve got good news and bad news. The good news: you’re getting brand-new shoes. The bad news: you know the 20-year-old, calling from jail...THAT WAS YOU...WHEN YOU CALLED COLLECT TWO MONTHS AGO.”

Bugsy winces and says, “Yeah, I sorta thought that’s where this story was going...”

Bugsy and David

Two reasons I like this story. First, Boyle still shows Bugsy that he loves him by buying him a pair of shoes, even though Bugsy was the one in the wrong in this story. He doesn't say, "Gotcha, you shouldn't have done that, I'm not buying you shoes after what you did!" He's able to simultaneously love him *and* speak truth to him about his mistakes. The second reason is because our story from Scripture today is similar. In this story Boyle doesn't just play some game of "Gotcha" with Bugsy, he does it to teach him a lesson through story. He gives Bugsy an outside perspective, and when Bugsy is able to be removed from the story, the right answer of who is the bigger person is clear. But when we're in the thick of a moment, it's harder to see right from wrong, as Bugsy clearly was in the wrong a few months back.

It is that way with King David in our story today. The prophet Nathan uses the power of storytelling and truth telling to show David that what he did was wrong. In the midst of the moment, David created a terrible problem, and tried to cover it up with other terrible problems. He couldn't stop himself and see that he was sinning until Nathan came and set him straight by telling him a story that gave David a different perspective. Nathan's truth telling makes David realize he sinned greatly.

Bathsheba and David - the set-up

But first, let's talk about the sin. In 2 Samuel 11, which we did not read this morning, David is on top of his palace looking down on the city of Jerusalem. He sees a beautiful woman bathing and inquired about her, and it was reported that this was Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Uriah is one of David's soldiers who is currently at war. So Bathsheba is alone. So David says, well then, I will stop looking at this beautiful woman, as she is married and I cannot make a married woman one of my wives - yes he had many wives - and I can't add her to my harem - yes, he had a harem. After all, David is a righteous man. He wouldn't do that. And they all lived happily ever after. No, that's not what happened. That's what should have happened. But even good people can sin greatly.

What actually happened is that David, using the power of king, told his henchmen to bring Bathsheba to him and he lay with her. Bathsheba likely had no voice in the matter, which makes David's sin of adultery even more disgusting. Now, Bathsheba was asking for it, right? She was a temptress bathing on a roof. What did she expect? This is all actually ways that people have read this story. There was even a movie made in the 50s about this story, I watched the trailer online, and the woman play Bathsheba was looking seductively at David in this scene. So let me set the record straight. None of that is in Scripture. What *is* in Scripture is that Bathsheba was bathing because she had just finished her period, and the law required that she did a ritual purifying bath at such a time. Second of all, none of us should ask the question of

any woman taken the way Bathsheba was taken of what she was wearing or if she was drunk or if she was asking for it. Bathsheba is a victim here of David abusing his power.

Bathsheba had no voice in the matter...in fact, she does not speak in this story except once. After that night, David sends her home, and she comes back and says, "I'm pregnant." This is the only voice she's given in the story, and it's to say that David's disgusting act of adultery led to pregnancy.

The story turns its focus back to David. David is wondering what to do...he took and slept with this woman and now he can't hide it. She's pregnant and her husband has been away the whole time fighting David's war. At this point, maybe David would make things right. Again, that's what should have happened. But once sin, and the shame of sin, has its talons in us, sin tricks us into thinking we can figure it out on our own without confession or repentance. So David concocts a disgusting plan.

He brings Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, home. Because if Uriah is home, he will be with Bathsheba, and it'll look like the child is his. If this is sounding more and more like a soap opera to you, just wait. But Uriah doesn't go home, and when David asks why, Uriah says, "The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing." At this time, honorable soldiers took no part in any type of pleasure while there was a war going on. Uriah was an

honorable man. Even the mere comfort of being in his own home was too much when he thought of his fellow soldiers in the field.

This ruins David's first plan, so he concocts another one. He'll get Uriah drunk, once he's drunk, he won't be so admirable and David's sin will be covered up. David again abuses his power, and forced Uriah to drink. After all, if the king hands you a drink, you have to drink it. Uriah gets drunk, but still does not return home.

Now David's plan goes from disgusting to diabolical. His sin will not be covered up by Uriah, and so the only option David sees in his clouded vision is to get rid of Uriah. David writes a letter to Joab, the commander of David's army, ordering him to send Uriah to the front lines of the worst fighting. In other words, ordering Joab to send Uriah to his death. And in a small but terrible detail, David send this letter with Uriah. Uriah unknowingly delivers his own death sentence.

Uriah dies in battle. Bathsheba mourns his death. And as soon as the customary time of mourning is done, Scripture tells us that "David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son." And the next words of Scripture are these: "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." Sin convinces us that we can make things right on our own without confession or repentance, but the Lord sees everything. There is no cover-up from God, who gracefully invites us all to confess that which he already knows. But David wouldn't do it.

I think it's funny how it says "the thing" because there are plenty of things David did in this story that displease me. The more I read this story and think about it, the more disgusted I am in David. David is a righteous person, Scripture tells us. He wrote some of the most beautiful psalms, he was the greatest king in Israel's history. But none of us, the most righteous or not, are immune to temptation on our own. Power and wealth corrupted David in this instance, and power and wealth can corrupt us as well. It's more important that we admit to ourselves that we *can* be tempted and make an effort to overcome temptation than to think to ourselves that we are immune or can resist temptation alone, because that's when temptation hits hardest.

Nathan

And when temptation does hit, we need people in our lives who speak truth to us. In Buggy's life, that was Greg Boyle. In David's life, it was the prophet Nathan. As I read earlier, Nathan creates a parable that takes David's perspective to one of an outsider, so that he is not stuck in the terrible cycle he was in earlier, and David correctly identifies the sin. We need truth tellers. We need storytellers. We all, as Christians, need to pick up the call to tell the truth and to not fear telling the truth. We need to love people enough to speak truth to them. And we need to be humble enough to accept the truth. That's where David finally turns the page. He admits that he sinned. He doesn't try to squirm his way out of the truth like he did during the whole rest of the story. He admits fault.

Voices

When I looked at this whole story this week, I kept reflecting on voice. There are five voices in this story. There is the voice of David, which is given authority because he is the king. He abuses this authority to lay with Bathsheba and kill Uriah. There is the voice of Bathsheba, which is repressed and only allowed to say that she is pregnant. There is the voice of Uriah, which is honorable, true, and gets him killed. Another voice repressed by David's abuse of power. Then there is the prophetic voice, two voices really, of Nathan and the Lord. This is the truth-telling voice. The voice that brings conviction. The Lord's voice through Nathan has the ultimate authority. It has the authority to break David out of his cycle of sin, denial, and botched cover-up plans.

I want us to go from this place thinking about voices. There are voices in our world that are lifted up, there are voices that are repressed. If we have a voice in the world, we as Christians are called to use it responsibly and righteously. To speak truth. To be storytellers. If we see any voices repressed, as David does in this story, we are called to speak for them and to fight for their right to speak. Proverbs 31:8-9 says this, "Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy." Our story today shows us a king who used his voice for himself and not for the voiceless, the destitute, the poor, the needy. There are countless others in our day who use their voices as David did here. As Christians, we are called to speak out for those who are not given a voice, not given an opportunity to speak.

Conclusion - Giving a voice

Speaking of voice, one of my favorite parts of Wednesday night book study is occasionally there is a break in the conversation, and we get to hear the small voices of our church's children singing together. My prayer for our children's choir is not just so they sing a few songs well at church, but rather for two deeper reasons. First, the more relationships a child has at church before finishing high school, the more likely they are to keep their faith after high school. Those relationships start early, and I want the kids of this church to hang out with people they might not otherwise during dinner before the book study and the choir rehearsal. So there's a relational part. The other part is for the individual child. I want children to know that they have a voice. Especially hear in the church. Each of them brings something to our church that serves the whole church. I want them to find that. Jesus said that the Kingdom of God belongs to children such as the ones who were surrounding him, the children the disciples tried to keep away from Jesus. We can learn about the Kingdom of God from the children of our church. We can empower them to know that they matter, that they are special, that they have a voice. We need to teach them that they matter before anything else tells them otherwise. We need to teach them that they have a voice and something meaningful to say before anything else tells them otherwise. Speak out for those who cannot speak. Let's start right here in our church. Let's commit to speaking truth as Nathan did, in creative ways like Nathan did. Let's commit to also hear truth as David does, who confesses and repents. Let's do this as a church.