



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR B, AUGUST 1, 2021
2 SAMUEL 11:26-12:13a; PSALM 51:1-13; EPHESIANS 4:1-16; JOHN 6:24-35

YOU ARE THE ONE

I am packing for a move, and as anyone knows who's ever tried to squeeze into a suitcase or into a moving van, there are decisions to make. I'm moving to my 18th apartment as an adult – and it hasn't been all upgrades, let me tell you! I have learned to get rid of stuff. But there is stuff that has made every last move. This little stuffed gorilla that my brother Joe gave me for my high school graduation gift – that gorilla's still here. But the giant purple plush bunny I got my kids for Easter thirty years ago...that guy's gone.

I used to schlep around the country 20 cartons – 20! – of books for which I did not EVER have shelf space. I now have no books in boxes. Just one big bookcase and one little one. Well, and a tall pile of books by my bed. And by my desk. And next to the couch. And – THAT's not the point here!

The point is, what do I REALLY *need* to take on this move? I need the poetry book with

illustrations by Joan Walsh Anglund that my mother and I used to read together. It brings my long-deceased mother close – and it feeds my heart.

What do we need, and how do we gauge that?

Today's readings really pound this question. Jesus says, "don't work for the food that perishes." And then we've got, as illustration, this sordid story of David and Uriah and Bathsheba. David has everything, but he lusts for Bathsheba, and what he *wants* so much becomes what he *needs*, that this arrogant king feels entitled to murder her husband Uriah for "the food that perishes."

This was the world of the Old Testament. The prophets are continually admonishing the kings that they're exploiting the people they're charged with taking care of as leaders, of taking what doesn't belong to them! And King David – our beloved David, the mere youth who slew the giant Goliath with a sling and a stone, with

his sweet singing voice and writing of Psalms, the ancestor of Jesus' lineage – David ends up one of the worst.

This is a hard reading, and particularly damning of the abuses of patriarchy. There is no talk of the sin against Bathsheba; it is about Uriah, about David stealing Uriah's *property*, if you will, and then stealing his very life.

When Nathan confronts David with the story of the poor man's lamb, it's not the lamb (or Bathsheba) that he's worried about, it's the heartbroken poor man. I name this because these readings are especially painful to the ears of women. But the point remains, and is highlighted: privilege run amok takes what it wants and is blind to its own misdeeds.

So I said this was the world of the Old Testament. But, of course, it is also the world of the Roman Empire, the New Testament, the Gospels. It is the world Jesus was born into and came to change – to bring a NEW Kingdom where privilege doesn't profligately reign, where oppression is overturned. And we know that is a world yet to be realized, in any era of history since...

...right up to our own era, where privilege is gasping and grasping to hold other people down – to hold People of Color down – for some myth of that bringing the material things that are lusted for – and some sense of superiority that covers the guilt of the wealth-and-opportunity disparity in this nation, and our culture's **un**Christian concern for self over community. Privilege trying so hard to cover its guilt that there are people who want to literally deny our nation's actual recorded history of genocide of indigenous people, of

slavery, of oppression of People of Color that continues to this day!

YOU ARE THE MAN, the prophet Nathan says. I feel those words, in my own intentional learning of the depth of the waters of white privilege that I swim in, so often obliviously.

When King David hears the prophet Nathan's story about the poor man and the lamb, he says, "That's not right! I'll kill that man." He doesn't even recognize how obviously this story is about him. Nathan has to say it directly: **YOU ARE THE MAN, DAVID.**

WE ARE THE MAN, too. Because it's the perverse world and culture we belong to, one rooted in wealth and acquisition, insisting that we need more material things, and more so, that some deserve **privilege** over others to have our own needs be our only priority. We have to work hard to swim against that tide. Because we are also, more so, followers of Jesus, and we are called by him to open our eyes. And we see Jesus today, in John's Gospel, telling us, "don't work for the food that perishes."

We traditionally tend to hear Jesus saying this as an admonishment of the people who followed after him along the Sea of Galilee. But these are the same people to whom Jesus **DID** just give the loaves and the fishes: *food that perishes*. Because they were **HUNGRY** and that was what they, in fact, **NEEDED**. And he cared for them.

Remember, the storytelling, the remembrances of Jesus in the Gospels, can't, and don't, give us the whole scene. And they are stylized writing, in the manner of their day. But they tell us truth about Jesus, and we, who seek the Jesus who is already with us, can picture more.

Picture the folks following Jesus along the waters of the Sea of Galilee, several miles to Capernaum. I doubt they were just looking for more bread, don't you? They had to sense something bigger was going on, and they were seekers! John writes that they got into boats and went looking for Jesus! And so Jesus challenges, teases them: "You're not chasing after me because you saw signs; you're just looking for more food!" But of course he knows there's more to it than that. He knows their hearts, OUR hearts, the seeking human heart that is drawn by God. When I read this Gospel, I can imagine Jesus saying that to spark them to be more intentional, to recognize their OWN seeking hearts.

And they do. They ask him a seminal question: "What do we NEED to do to perform the works of God?"

Aaaand... Jesus gives them an obtuse answer: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

"Well, fine," they say. "If we're going to believe, we need a bigger sign. MOSES fed people manna in the wilderness. Whadda you got?"

And THIS is where Jesus opens up about what we actually NEED. The bread that gives life to the world. "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

So much of our Western Christianity heritage has heard this as a dogmatic statement. But throughout the Gospel, what has Jesus been bringing and teaching? The dismantling of systems of privilege that leave so many people hungry – and murdered! A central theme of John's Gospel is about believing Jesus is the

Messiah, but what does this Messiah DO and BRING and TEACH?

Believe in Jesus the Messiah. Not as dogma, but in how to live! As Paul wrote and we heard this morning: "Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called... with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

That is what we NEED. Not the things our privilege tweaks us to lust after. We follow after Jesus the way the folks in the boats did, knowing that there is something deeper, better, more significant, more integral to our being – that to which we are called: BELIEVING in Jesus, a recognition of our life in the Spirit, our belovedness in the God who came for love of us. That's what we NEED. That's how we "perform the works of God." Because if we believe in this Bread of Life, this Jesus, then we can't help but live "the calling to which we are called": to dismantle the systems that oppress, to see no one as stranger, to love unabashedly without borders, to work for the COMMON good. That is how we "make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Check your privilege, King David. Is everything you WANT, really what you NEED? And did it bring forth good? Read the next chapter of 2 Samuel. *It does not.*

Check your own privilege, Nancy. Do you even recognize how your privilege affects this world? Can you follow Jesus to bring about the NEW Kingdom, where there is one privilege

for all in the arms of the God who loves us all equally? That's going to be a lot of work.

But I know that you know this: it is work that feels right! Because we are here together because we're seekers. We're the folks in the boats! And we know whoever comes to Jesus

will never be hungry, and whoever believes will never be thirsty for what our Spirit yearns for. I will pack my old poetry book; it invigorates a deep Spirit in me. Like you do. May our privilege be being in each other's company on this journey, following Jesus in the work we are called to.

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a *[When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."]*

John 6:24-35 *[The next day, when the people who remained after the feeding of the five thousand saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"] Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."]*