



The Nourishing Vocation Project

Engaging the Living Word

[II Samuel 12:1-14](#)

What is this particular text?

- Story
 - Critical “chapter” in the story of David
- Prophetic speech
 - Nathan exposes David’s sin through a prophetic allegory
- Confession
 - David confesses
- Truth-to-Power
 - Nathan speaks truth to power
- Forgiveness with accountability
 - David is forgiven
 - His child will die

How does the text function within the scriptural story?

- Story of Judgment
 - Demonstration of the consequences of violating God’s law
 - Example of biblical retribution
 - Theological portrayal of divine justice
- All human beings are flawed – even those chosen by God for “great” things
- David was a public leader
 - There is no such thing as the king’s private life
 - His personal and public life are interwoven

How can this text function in the church today?

- Invitation to consider how the church has abused its power
- What failures is God calling us to confront?
- How is the church being called to speak truth to power today?
- What role does confession have in the church’s public life today?

What does the text do to you? How do you react to the text? What feelings does this text engender in you?

- David’s behavior disgusts me
- Evokes sorrow for the sins of the father that will be born out upon the children
- Taps into experiences of trauma when I have experienced abuse of power by someone in authority
- Hope that justice does exist
- Overwhelming gratitude that God is faithful to forgive, even amid what seems like the unforgiveable

What do you have to say to the text?

- Way to go, Nathan!
- How did Nathan have the courage to confront the king?
- Bathsheba is absent from this moment of reckoning
- The silencing of Bathsheba's voice speaks volumes
- I want to hear from Bathsheba

What do you see through this text from the story itself?

- Forgiveness does not exclude accountability
- No one is above God's law
- Forgiveness is real, even in the most atrocious circumstances
- "Private" sins have public consequences

What do you see from within your church/community/world? (2022)

- The church has been both David and Nathan
 - Which is it today?
 - In what circumstances is it David?
 - In what circumstances is it Nathan?
- Power is intoxicating and dangerous
- Abuse of power destroys relationships, trust, and community
- Abuse of power generates generational trauma
- Family violence and trauma is not a "private matter"
- Crises of our current time
 - Violence against women
 - Silencing victims of abuse of power
 - Silencing victims of sexual assault
 - Abuse of power from a host of contexts
 - Politics
 - Religion
 - Family systems

What do you see within yourself?

- I hear God calling me to repentance for my own failings
- I hear God calling others to repentance for the sins against me
- I hear God's word of forgiveness

What is the context – textual and historical?

- In the midst of the David and Bathsheba narrative
 - Follows David's abuse of Bathsheba
 - Follows David setting up the death of Uriah
 - Follows Bathsheba's lamentation over her husband's death
 - Follows David taking Bathsheba to be his wife
 - Follows the birth of their child
- Precedes the sickness and death of the child
- Precedes the birth of Solomon

What questions does this text raise for you?

- What about Bathsheba?
- What would Bathsheba say to all of this?
- Did David really think he would get away with all of this?
- How could David be trusted again?
- Why does Bathsheba have to suffer more as a part of David's consequences?
- How did forgiveness change David?

What words/themes seem of particular import?

- Displeased the Lord
- You are the man!
- Thus says the Lord
- I have sinned
- The Lord has put away your sin

What is the Gospel / transforming Good News within this text?

- Forgiveness is real
- God is faithful
- God is still working for good, despite human failures
- Contrition and Confession are critical components of faith
- The future can be different from the past

What is the as-over-againstness of this text?

- Sin is real
- Sinful acts multiply
- Sin is indeed us turned in on ourselves, ignoring the impact on others
- Human failure is never private: its consequences ripple out like the rings from a pebble in a pond
- Abuse of power is never without consequence

Who does this text say that Jesus is, or if not Jesus, then who does this text say that God is? What does this text say about God?

- God is faithful
- God is displeased with rebellion against God
- God brings about justice
- God forgives
- God makes new
- God creates a new future out of a flawed past

What have others said about this text?

- [“Preaching that tells this story”](#) in all its fullness will push us beyond the polarities that often order our thinking. It will remember David as murderer, adulterer, and predatory king *as well as* hero, beloved of God, and singer of psalms. It will break up the stories we tend to tell about others and ourselves, stories in which we are either good enough — not perfect, but good enough — that we have no real need of grace, or so bad that we are beyond the scope of grace. Remembering David's sin can also push us beyond the poles of cynicism and naivete in our political and institutional lives. The politics of David's court are brutal. But — often in spite of themselves, and almost always in ways the actors do not fully understand — these power politics

are caught up in God's redeeming work." Ted A. Smith, Associate Professor of Preaching and Ethics, Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, Ga.

- ["Glaringly absent from this text"](#) is Bathsheba's voice. It is ironic that whereas she in the beginning of the pericope was lamenting for her husband, now when her child dies we do not hear what had to be this bereaved mother weeping at the top of voice. Perhaps Bathsheba's silence in this text about the death of her child in addition to the events that led her to this place is fitting given the fact that so many victims of sexual violence today are silent and silenced." Juliana Claassens, Professor of Old Testament, University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, South Africa
- ["King David's manipulation of military maneuvers"](#) in order to advance his own sexual interests are a clear and explicit example of abused power. David utilizes his power as King to send an innocent man to certain death in order satisfy his own immediate interest with Bathsheba. What is remarkable though, is that it takes Nathan's parable for the King to realize the gravity of the evil he has perpetrated. David had the legal capacity to satisfy his short-term desires, and he acted accordingly, without an ethical thought interrupting. He does not seem to realize the sin he has committed until it is expressed to him in more explicit terms." Rev. John Allen

What will I teach or proclaim?

- God brings justice for the oppressed
- Forgiveness and accountability are connected
- God forgives – even you!
- Faith, Confession, and Trust cannot be separated
- This text is a mirror: what do we see?
- Speaking Truth to Power Today
- God's mercy is wider than even our greatest failures
- Silenced no more – giving voice to victims of sexual violence
- Create in me a clean heart, O God