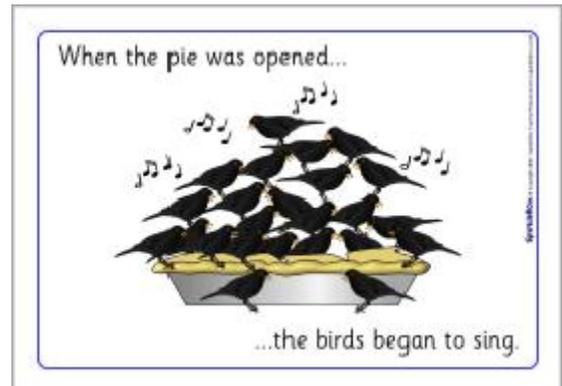


I realized this week that I've heard today's Old Testament lesson before, another version of it, as a child. And not in church, either. Maybe you've heard this alternate version of the David and Bathsheba story:

The king was in the counting-house // counting out his money,
The queen was in the parlor // eating bread and honey,
The maid was in the garden // hanging out the clothes.
Along came a blackbird // and ripped off her nose.

In both versions of the same story, the king is not where he's supposed to be. In the nursery rhyme, the king is fixated on money, absorbed no doubt by gouging and keeping as much as he can for himself. Today we are cynics about people with power. We know from long, bitter experience that even the best of people, seemingly, get corrupted by power.



Evidently, this is what had happened to King David. He was a “highly favored” person, holy, just, AND a great warrior. He had been leading God’s Army—trusting in God—and winning for almost 20 years. But not today. Today, King David was in his counting house; well, he wasn’t where he was supposed to be.

Our lesson begins with this little factoid: The King was supposed to be leading the troops, but David sent General Joab off to fight and he remained in Jerusalem. What do you think THAT was about?

Maybe David’s closest advisors, great people such as Nathan, who we heard about last Sunday, maybe their advice to David was to divest himself of hands-on leadership of the Army. After all, Joab was a highly competent General. Maybe they told David he needed to delegate more. And maybe David DID need that (or maybe not).

Do you think David prayed, “God, please show me how you want to use ME on behalf of our people at this time?”

I don’t think so. Or, if so, David clearly didn’t listen. ’Cuz God didn’t direct David to be a “Peeping Tom” king. And that’s what David did with his new-found time. He peeked. He stared. He drooled. He wanted something (someone) not his, someone not for him. Because David was already married, and the woman he lusted over was already married, as well.

A few Sundays ago, we heard that David’s wife, Michael, despised him. The lesson on THAT day didn’t say Michael was David’s wife; it identified her as “Saul’s daughter.” We know from David prancing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem that Michael despised him. And if we had read a few more verses than were in our lesson on that day, we would have learned that there were servant girls involved—other women. No wonder the Queen was in the parlor eating bread and honey all by herself.

Actually, David had more than one wife by this time. Against God’s Law, the Law delivered by Moses, the Law in the very Ark David had brought to Jerusalem hoping for “showers of God’s blessings,” no doubt. David had made many alliances with other tribes and nations, sealing each deal with an additional wife. “just wanting to be like everyone else,” no doubt. Maybe this is why God hadn’t wanted us to have human rulers in the first place: We’re so FLAWED by power and money. We are so flawed by sin.

I know: You want to write off this bad behavior as “human nature.” Say there are 60 adults at this service. You might guess that at least 50 of us have strayed from God’s Law about marriage and sex, if not also power. To that argument I would say, “Prevalence of sin doesn’t make sinful behavior right.”

And what David did was very bad behavior, indeed. He did more than rip off the maid’s clothes or nose. He had her husband killed, a person depicted here as the epitome of honor, the very person David was supposed to be; the very person David had been before he let his power go to his head.

I know: You want to implicate the woman. Maybe. Today, anyway. But probably not. Because of the huge power imbalance: David was king, so the woman couldn’t really give unconstrained consent. Whereas David had the power to move people around like chess pieces in the game of life. But life is only a game to people with great power; the rest of us are pawns.

But maybe Bathsheba was allured by power. Maybe she should have been like other great heroes later in Jewish history: like Queen Esther and Daniel and the three young men, all of whom stood up to a king on behalf of God. We don’t know, so we’ll leave Bathsheba to be stoned by those of us who have never sinned.

What this part of David’s story tells us is that none of us are exempt from sin. And sin has bad consequences. How we deal with sin—our sin—will be crucial in whether we live in health or get stuck in our mess.

- Will we deny our bad behavior? Pretend we’re exempt from consequences? The people with this strategy is that “truth will out,” as has been said. Truth is self-validating, whereas falsehood gets tripped up in and by self.

- Will we confess our sins and ask God and those we have sinned against to forgive us our sins? David's story teaches us that we can do this, that we can make sin "right."
- Because God loves each and every one of us even though we are all sinners, we don't have to be holy all the time for God to love us. We don't have to be hold ANY of the time for God to love us. In fact, we can only be holy BECAUSE God loves us and beckons for us to get well, to be well, to repent.
- How? That's next week's lesson. In a nutshell, though, we have to do what the 12-step folks have perfected: We have to admit that our lives, due to sin, have become unmanageable. And then we have to admit that we can't fix things our sin has ripped apart all by ourselves. Then we have to "let go and let God," asking him to return us to life and health, making amends where needed.

And (returning to the nursery rhyme) isn't THAT a dainty dish to set before the Lord, our true king?