

Enough of This

July 28, 2024

2 Samuel 11:1-15

John 6:1-21

King David tends to dominate the Scriptures in which he appears. That's true of the passages in which he's mentioned, but it's especially true when he took a major role in what the text describes. When David is in the room, there's not a lot of oxygen for anybody else.

But.

This is Bathsheba's story.

She bathed. The text is a little ambiguous, but strongly implies she was not just physically cleansing herself, but ritually cleansing herself. Her husband, a soldier in the army, was away at the siege of Rabbah. She was alone.

I don't know whether any rumor came to her ears about people asking about her. What would she have thought if she did? Would she have worried about some unknown threat? Would she have trusted that her neighbors and friends would be able to protect her? Would she have simply thought, "I can't believe anyone is asking about me."

Did she simply not hear anything at all?

Then the messengers came from the King with a summons. What could that be about? Her husband was in the army – oh, no. Could this be the message every spouse of a soldier fears? Had her husband died? Been seriously wounded? Would she leave the palace in tears?

She arrived at the palace. There was the king. There were the other soldiers, the honor guard. Did they leave before he said, "Come to the bedroom"? Did they hear the king's demand? Did the light glinting from their armor – and their weapons – add force to the orders of royalty? Or was it enough that swords and spears lurked in the hallway outside?

Gennifer Benjamin Brooks writes at Working Preacher, "Bathsheba is innocent of wrong-doing, even to the point of obeying the dictates of the king at the cost of her own peace of mind. As many in society she responds to the voice of authority because she is required to do so, because of the hierarchical structure of her world, which places her on the bottom."

When the rape was over – and that’s what it was, do not mistake it – did she leave the palace in tears? Or did she hold her face as still as she might contrive, so that nobody would see her pain, her grief, her undeserved shame?

And then... she realized she was pregnant.

Why did she go to David, who had raped her? Her choices were limited. Jennifer Benjamin Brooks goes on to write, “It is the story of poor women everywhere who because of their poverty must turn for help to their abuser because she has nowhere else to turn.” Bathsheba would have stood accused of adultery on the evidence of her pregnancy. Israel’s law essentially required a woman to call for help during a sexual assault, assuming consent if she did not. It did not recognize that the threats of a king could enforce her silence.

So she told David.

What might she have expected? Perhaps she hoped for David’s honesty, that he would have spoken to Uriah, the soldier in his army. Perhaps she hoped that David would make some kind of offer to assuage her husband’s just wrath, that he might even take responsibility in a tangible way. I wonder if she even heard that Uriah was summoned back to the city. Did she know her husband maintained his fidelity to his army comrades? Did she know that David’s plan to cover up his crime had failed?

It's always about the cover-up, isn't it?

Joanna Harader writes at *The Christian Century*, “In this story, both Bathsheba and Uriah have what David lacks: integrity.

“It is easy to feel disappointed, even disoriented, when we find out that our would-be heroes aren’t so heroic after all. In our disorientation, perhaps we can reorient around those whose quiet courage and integrity challenge those who use their power in self-serving ways. Whenever there is a King David abusing people and power, we can usually also find Bathshebas—those who insist on speaking the truth about the abuse, regardless of the consequences. We can usually also find Uriahs, behaving with integrity even in the context of a corrupt system.”

I’m sure she didn’t know about the message David sent to his field commander, Joab, when Uriah returned to the army. You know. The order to murder.

Well, it worked. The next thing Bathsheba learned – in the sections of 2 Samuel beyond the passage we heard this morning – was that her husband had fallen in battle. She mourned.

Then David sent for her again, made Bathsheba his wife (one of his wives), and she bore his son.

Dear God.

“But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.” (2 Samuel 11:27b)

Dear God, I hope it did. I hope it does.

The hashtag #MeToo gets less play on social networks than it did a few years ago. We’ve seen significant sexual assault convictions overturned on disputed procedural grounds. Significant public figures have been exposed as serial abusers, even rapists, to the shock and dismay of people who’d supported their politics or enjoyed their entertainment. “Honestly,” writes Joanna Harader, “the list of entertainers and church leaders who have turned out to be abusers is depressingly long. It’s almost as if power and prestige somehow facilitate abusive patterns and protect perpetrators!”

“Almost as if,” for sure.

As Richard Hoch writes at Working Preacher, “The Hebrew verb ‘to take’ in verse 4 (translated as ‘to get’ in the NRSV) recalls Samuel’s warning to Israel about the nature of kings: ‘These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take . . .’ (1 Samuel 8:11-18). ‘He will take your sons, your daughters, your fields, your wealth.’ Coercive power will be, according to Samuel, characteristic of the ‘ways’ of the king.

“It is also the way of rapists.”

Enough of this.

Jesus spoke those words to stem violence during his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, but I hear them echoing around sexual violence as well. There is no excuse. It’s not about clothing or the lack of it – remember that Jesus also advised that if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It’s not about what any man “deserves” for physical intimacy. It’s what every woman (or man, or child) deserves for respect of their bodily, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Nobody is entitled to someone else.

Enough of this.

I’m tired of the excuses. In 2014 Jen Brockman and Dr. Mary Wyandt-Hiebert created the touring art exhibit “What Were You Wearing,” which combined clothing of assault survivors with their stories. Strikingly, as it moves from campus to campus, it accumulates new clothing and new stories which... breaks my heart.

Enough of this.

I’m tired of the discounting of women’s stories and of women’s value. Judges repeatedly decline to “ruin this young man’s life,” when he’s made a significant attempt at ruining a woman’s life. Rape survivors hold their silence, often for years, because they can’t bear the

added insult to injury of not being believed by a system and a society which will, by that refusal to believe, betray them.

Enough of this.

I'm tired of the frequency of it all. According to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network, an American is sexually assaulted every 68 seconds. One in six American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime. About 3% of American men – one in thirty-three – have experienced an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime. Using data from the National Sexual Assault Hotline, they find that 55% of assaults occur in the victim's home.

Enough of this.

No more excuses. No more dismissals. And for the love of God, the only acceptable frequency for sexual assault is *none*.

David, this is not your story. It's Bathsheba's, a story of trust violated and power abused. Mercifully, it is not the end of Bathsheba's story. As Wil Gafney writes at Working Preacher: "Bathsheba's story ends in 1 Kings chapters 1-2. She and Nathan work together to get Solomon on the throne. In Bathsheba's last appearance in the scriptures, Solomon installs her on a throne at his right-hand side, gets up off of his throne and bows down before her. This may well be the beginning of the tradition of the Gevirah, the Queen Mother as an authoritative office that would characterize the later Judean monarchy. This text is an important supplement to Bathsheba's rape narrative in 2 Samuel 11 because she survives the rape and David and thrives in spite of what it and he has done to her."

Thank you for your survival, Bathsheba, and for the survival of generations of women who have followed you. Someday, I hope and pray, there will be a last survivor, because the perpetrators will finally stop. May that day be today.

Amen.

by Eric Anderson