

“What Fills Us?”
July 29, 2018

2 Samuel 11:1-15

11:1 In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. 11:2 It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. 11:3 David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." 11:4 So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. 11:5 The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant." 11:6 So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. 11:7 When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. 11:8 Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. 11:9 But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. 11:10 When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?" 11:11 Uriah said to David, "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." 11:12 Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, 11:13 David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house. 11:14 In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. 11:15 In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die."

Ephesians 3:14-21

3:14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 3:15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. 3:16 I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, 3:17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. 3:18 I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 3:19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 3:20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, 3:21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

John 6:1-21

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were [filled}, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

2nd Samuel takes offers us a story today. If the Bible rated stories this one wouldn't be PG. It's more like something that would come on very late at night when hopefully the kids are asleep. Just the beginning let's us know it's about adult themes. "In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem." Not one of your more comforting or peaceful biblical images. And it quickly deteriorates from there.

What follows is a sadly classic tale of lives being torn apart and tragedy begetting tragedy. In the short span of a few months there is the all too often repeated scenario of absolute wealth and power demanding the fulfillment of desire that is out of control which devastates lives and is followed by coercion and murder and by the end of the story for today...lives are left in fragments. No one is happy. A plot is set to cover up the crime. A soldier husband shows the guilty yearning king something about faithfulness. Friendships are destroyed. A bright and shining king who was a boyhood hero with a polished stone hurled from a sling, and a harp playing soothing songs for his predecessor, and a reputation of faithfulness and trust in almighty God and a joyous servant dancing his way into Jerusalem to establish THE line that will give birth to the Messiah

awaits with impatience for the dastardly news of the death of his rival for the prize of a beautiful woman. Where lives were whole and happy there exist now only fragments of a reality that not so long ago was idyllic, a Camelot of ancient proportions and equal treachery.

The story of David and Bathsheba isn't a love story. It is more than even a cautionary tale of what can happen in our weakness. It is a glaring example of an often repeated scenario of the powerful preying on the powerless. It tells of the ease with which those who are in control can spin even their own goodness into a tale of deep darkness and sadness. It is, of course, not unique to this king and earthly ruler, it is a story that is played out from inside castle walls to church sacristies, to the board rooms of corporate giants, to the halls of congress, to the sanctuary of the locker room, and in the shadows of hollywood's brightest lights --and the result is always the same. Lives left in broken pieces. Fragments of what they once were. People of power who despoil those without who are trying to find that elusive element which will fill them.

The details change but the truth of this story rings true in all of our living. Whenever people step outside of the bounds of that which is right and good their follows destruction and the dismantling of the human spirit, of the human potential. Whatever the obsession, it leaves in its wake

broken people groping in darkness to put back together their fragmented lives. Brokenness always follows.

So what might this have to do with our other story for today? Which also happens in the spring of the year, we know this because John tells us it's near the time of Passover. All the gospel writers are impressed with what happens on this spring afternoon and tell the amazing tale in their own way.

So what brings these 5000 men, women and children, out in the middle of nowhere seeking out this one that the Baptist, another popular figure, said was far greater than he? What makes people go out to see someone like Jesus? What need is in their living that wants so desperately to be filled?

Surely beyond curiosity there is the truth there that these people, just people, like we are people, who have heard of this wandering rabbi and the wonderful things he says and does want to come and experience what so many others have reported. Illnesses cured, injuries healed, hearing and sight restored, forgiveness given, wholeness offered for broken and fragmented lives.... Lives in pieces because of all those things that break us apart. Hunger in all of its forms, hunger for recognition, hunger for restoration of relationship, hunger for understanding of oneself and ones

need. Lives in pieces because of illness with no promise of cure. Lives in pieces because something, something unnamable, unidentifiable is missing, some element for happiness and peace just isn't there, so here they come, in droves, out searching, each of them for something to make them feel whole. Something to fill them.

It's been a long day and we find Jesus and the disciples out of reach of the nearest town. No cell service means no possibility of catering. There's no deli around the corner, so its left to the devices of the 12 who pronounce the feeding of this huge throng to be far too big an undertaking. Even if there was a place to buy food, six months wages wouldn't be enough. So much need. What to do?

While the disciples are worrying about Jesus' testing inquiry -- "Where are we to buy bread for these people?" -- one small solution steps forward. A little boy has five barley loaves and two fish. With childlike trust, the boy, offers all that he has to Jesus and the disciples. Smart kid. At least as the gospel writers tell the story he's the only one who had the presence of mind to bring some lunch, or perhaps his mom handed him the sack as he was going out the door. It doesn't matter, what happens is he, among all of them, gives what he has for the cause.

Andrew, one of the younger disciples, has enough presence of mind (and perhaps a small flicker of hope) to offer these childish gifts to Jesus. But his hard-nosed adult rationality gets in the way, for even as Andrew offers the loaves and fish with one hand, he pulls them back with a defeatist, "What are they among so many?" dismissal. Jesus likes the child's solution. He uses the little boy's gift to feed the people. While the text does not say that the child had faith in Jesus' ability to create a miracle, this child's heartfelt gift does indicate that his vision and hope were not limited by the accepted norms of the day. He saw possibility, not puniness, in those five loaves and two fish. It was his lunch for heaven's sake, but he gave it sacrificially. That day the child taught the disciples a lesson: They should have been looking for ways to succeed, not looking for excuses to fail.

When it's all over....John says, "When they were [filled], he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." Only the gospel of John has these few words, 'so that nothing may be lost.'" The disciples go walking amidst these people who have come to this place in need...need of a story to tell...need of healing...need of forgiveness...and most recently in need of food....and amongst the fragile, broken mass of people...12 baskets of fragments are

gathered, nothing is lost. And in the process, along with bread and fish these people are filled-- with hope. If nothing is loss, not a piece, not a fragment, the powerful message is that no person is lost either. All the broken pieces, all the people are gathered together. Nothing, no one is lost. No one is to be abandoned. No one is beyond redemption.

The people are so transformed by what has happened, Jesus fears that they will come and try to make him what he is not intended to be...so he slips off up the mountain by himself, and the disciples, when evening comes get back in the boat, and back on the sea.

With fascinating insight, John couples the story of the feeding of the 5000, of filling with hope to those who live in a hostile world under the occupation of a dominating power who will do with them as they choose, with another story to bang home the point with thunder and lightning.

In the midst of our life's storms that might devastate us, that could break us apart and leave us in fragments...that could smash the boat of our living in pieces... along comes Jesus. Walking out to us...calming our fears..helping to put our troubled fragmented lives back in working order. He wants us to know that even though we live those fragmented lives....with so many problems...and so few solutions... even when it

seems as if we have been abandoned, that God in Jesus his son comes to us and tells us once again, "It is I, Don't be afraid."

That's how God works. God comes to us and helps us to pick up the pieces, to reclaim the fragments of our broken lives in order to restore us to a new reality. We know what he did for David and Bathsheba. They became, in God's forgiveness and restoration the parents of Solomon and the great, great, well you get the picture, grandparents of a man named Jesus. The point being there is no broken life, no fragmented existence beyond God's ability to fix, to reconcile, to reconstruct...to restore to wholeness. Jesus takes the fragments and pieces of our lives and leaves nothing and no one behind to be discarded.

Jesus says, come to me. And in him we are filled.