

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

2 Samuel 11:26 - 12:13a

^{11:26} When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. ²⁷ 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, ^{12:1} 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. ² The rich man had very many flocks and herds; ³ 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. ⁴ 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." ⁵ 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; ⁶ he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." ⁷ 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; ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." ^{13a} David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

Commentary

The editors of 1 and 2 Samuel incorporated into the text several different narratives (such as Saul's narrative and the ark narrative). Nathan's parable of the poor man's lamb is part of the "succession narrative"—a story of God's promise to David to establish his throne forever. Bathsheba mourned when she heard of Uriah's death, as was the observed custom. Then David "sent for" and married her. We sometimes romanticize this woman who David coveted, seeking perhaps to soften David's harsh actions and ignore his sin. In reality, we don't know

what she felt or wanted. She was probably at the mercy of the King's power. David has wielded power by "sending" people and messages to do his bidding. Now God exerted divine power, "sending" the prophet Nathan to David. God forgave David, but the sinful affair marked a turning point in his life. God's judgement was severe: ongoing conflict, rape, killing, alienation, and conspiracy all would occur in David's house. The pure and powerful David, God's chosen one, had fallen. The narrator weaves throughout the story a dramatic tracing of how God worked through human events to shape Israel's future. Nathan's parable illustrates how Israel's prophets (God's spokespersons) repeatedly confronted their king's moral crimes. While other ancient Near East rulers might rule absolutely and capriciously, Israel's king was accountable to YHWH.

Reflection

David abused his power, and the rich man abused his. What was Nathan's underlying message about power? Who are the Davids today who abuse power? Who are today's Nathans who speak out against abuse of power? When have you abused your power or position? How did you recognize that abuse? When has our church been a David? a Nathan?

Ephesians 4:1-16

^{4:1} I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. ⁷ But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." ⁹ (When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. ¹⁴ We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Commentary

Either Paul or one of his flock wrote to the Gentile Christians at Ephesus in the late first century about unity and diversity in the church. In 4:1-6, the writer appeals believers to be worthy of their calling "to keep unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." "Peace" in this instance refers to God's salvation, not just a lack of human conflict. Jesus Christ brought peace by joining two parties (Jew and Gentile) and reconciling them to God. "Bond" refers to that reconciled divine/human relationship. The church is also reminded that they have been graced

with Christ-given diverse gifts. Ephesians accents leadership functions in an expanding church that was becoming more organized. However, the emphasis is still on member's complimentary tasks. This lection presents a tension. On one hand, the believers are called to unity (one body, baptism); and on the other hand, we are called to honor diversity (one body, many gifts.) First century Christians were concerned mostly about Jewish-Gentle unity and diversity, unlike the wide-ranging concerns we have in the church today.

Reflection

Ephesians urged believers to maintain unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. What do peace and bond mean? How do you live up to that calling? How do you explain for yourself the dual message of unity with diversity in Ephesians? How well does our church live out this message, and how might we do it better?

John 6:24-35

^{6:24} So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. ²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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." ²⁸ Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." ³⁰ 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?" ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² 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. ³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." ³⁵ 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."

Commentary

The word "sign" recalls two earlier signs (the water-to-wine miracle at Cana in 2:1-12 and his offering of "living water" in 4:7-15) where people believed after they saw Jesus' sign and quickly spread the word. This crowd believed only in full stomachs, seeking bread that perishes. After rebuking the crowd, Jesus urged them to "work for" food that endures. But they misunderstood. He was offering them a divine gift, but they asked how to get bread that would not go stale. The crowd said they would do God's work—believe—only if Jesus first gave them a sign. Jesus' assessment was confirmed: They had already been fed with miraculous bread! In v. 32-33, Jesus tried again. He told them that God, not Moses, gave the bread in the desert; that his offer of bread was the "true bread from heaven." They (not their ancestors) were the true recipients of God's gift. In the Gospel of John, a sign is intended to evoke faith but is by itself insufficient grounds for faith. If we look only at the sign, and end up exclaiming, "See what Jesus *does!*"—we either believe that Jesus is the miracle worker or fails to be

according to the outcome of our lives. But if we look beyond the sign to the meaning of Jesus' words, we exclaim "See who Jesus *is!*" Jesus comes from God—himself a sign of God who is.

Reflection

The crowd misunderstood Jesus' sign as well as his explanation. When have you looked for a sign, only to miss it—or interpret it too literally? How does the crowd misunderstand? How do you understand the relationship between God and Jesus in this feeding miracle?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 51

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
**according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.**
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 **For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.**
- 4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.
- 5 **Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.**
- 6 You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
- 7 **Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.**
- 8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
- 9 **Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.**
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
- 11 **Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.**
- 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen**