

**First United Methodist Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Lectionary Study Guide**

For use the week of July 19-25, 2021

9th Sunday After Pentecost

July 25, 2021

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 11:1-15

^{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. 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. ³ David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." 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. ⁵ The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant." ⁶ So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. ⁷ When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. 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. 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. 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 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." 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, 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. ¹⁴ In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. 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."

Commentary

This week begins a series of two readings from what has become, next to David's defeat of Goliath, perhaps the most famous episode in David's life. David appointed Joab to head up the forces of Israel, and his decision to not lead his armies in and out of battle as their King left him at home where he did not belong and in a position to witness what he ought not to have seen.

Bathsheba was a Torah-observant daughter, and was engaged in a ritual purification after her monthly period. She was bathing in an enclosed courtyard, not in public view as is assumed by many readers, and was visible to David only because of the elevation of his citadel. He summoned Bathsheba to his palace, and she was forced to commit adultery, as women in that society were seen as mere property and had very little agency or freedom on their own accord. When Bathsheba conceived, David's lack of self-control was evident, as Bathsheba's husband Uriah was too disciplined a soldier to "lie with his wife" while they were all at risk in battle. Knowing that Uriah would never defile himself by the laws of purity in battle, David then set up Uriah to be killed, and took Bathsheba as his wife. He was determined to pass off the child as an early, but legitimate one.

Reflection

What factors increased David's vulnerability to sin? Which was David's greater sin—adultery with Bathsheba (personal and sexual) or abandoning his leadership responsibilities (social and political)? Do we in our churches accept the penitent sinner, or do we encourage people to cover up their sins and prevent their healing?

Ephesians 3:14-21

^{3:14} For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. 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, ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. 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, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 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, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Commentary

This is the second time the author has shared the contents of his prayers for the hearers (see 1:17-19). Here the focus is primarily on Christ's love for the believer, which an author prays will become the center and source of stability for the Christian's entire life. The images of tree roots and the foundation of a building convey the importance of grasping the immensity of this love—even though this is an attempt at knowing the unknowable. Meditating on the dimensions of this love, however, helps the believer apprehend God's fullness. The doxology (v. 20-21) expresses the desire that honor will come to God by means of Christ and the Church. The Epistle lections for this and the next four weeks continue through Ephesians, turning now from reflection on God's generosity and mystery to the response of Christians to God's favor. As the writer shows us, that response is encouraged and supported by our own prayers as well as the prayers of others.

Reflection

How have you seen God's power at work in you? When has God done the unexpected or the unimaginable in your life? How are we living to bring God honor? How can our response to God be more complete?

John 6:1-21

^{6:1} After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ² A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³ Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵ 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?" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." ¹³ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴ 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." ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷ got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." ²¹ Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

Commentary

For five weeks, the Gospel lessons will remain focused on the "bread of life," something that the crowds who hoped for repeat performances of the feeding miracle failed to perceive. John is intentional to link this episode of Jesus' life with Jewish calendar days, and here, Passover is the setting—the holiday that recalled God's deliverance of the people from Egypt and God's provision of food in the desert. These two are frequently linked in the psalms celebrating the Exodus. As Jesus led the crowds from the towns into the deserted areas, He was identified by the people as "the prophet who is to come into the world," harkening back to God's promise to raise up a prophet like Moses for the people. It inaugurated a renewed wilderness experience, which was regarded by the Jews as a special time of intimacy between Israel and God, in spite

of our constant “murmuring.” The people enjoyed a simple meal, and knew something astounding happened, but we should not overlook the factor of physical hunger in this ancient agrarian economy that left most people at the subsistence level. The opportunity to have a full stomach would not be taken for granted. The sequel to this episode is one of the strangest in all the Gospels. Jesus uses the divine disclosure formula, “I am” to identify himself atop the waves. The walking on the sea was like a parable, for in Jewish culture, the sea represented death. That Jesus could walk on water was his sign of victory over death. This triumph over death was also represented in the bread of life. The promise is that all who ate the bread of life given by Jesus could, like him, be raised from the dead.

Reflection

The crowds acclaimed Jesus on the basis of having their temporal needs met. To what extent are you interested in a Messiah who will simply make life smoother in this world? Why do you think Jesus tested the disciples? Why did the crowd react as they did, and what were they seeking?

Responsive Psalter

From Psalm 14

- ¹ Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God."
**They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds;
there is no one who does good.**
- ² The LORD looks down from heaven on humankind
to see if there are any who are wise,
who seek after God.
- ³ **They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse;
there is no one who does good,
no, not one.**
- ⁴ Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers
who eat up my people as they eat bread,
and do not call upon the LORD?
- ⁵ **There they shall be in great terror,
for God is with the company of the righteous.**
- ⁶ You would confound the plans of the poor,
but the LORD is their refuge.
- ⁷ **O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion!
When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people,
Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.**

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.