

July 19 2015

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalms 89:20-37

II Samuel 11:26-12:10

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Sermon *Nathan and His Little Lamb*

I think you remember the song; you may join in and sing it.

Mary had a little lamb,

Little lamb, little lamb.

Mary had a little lamb.

It's fleece was white as snow.

Strangely the same tune, I think, can be used in the 11th and 12th chapters of 2nd Samuel to describe the prophet Nathan and his parable of the little sheep, which was just shared with us. Nathan had just a little lamb. Its fleece was white as snow. You may or you may not remember Nathan, that he was a prophet at the time and in the court of King David. In this passage Nathan was expressly sent by God to confront his king about a grave error in judgment and the resulting injustices which had occurred as a result.

Unfortunately, many people in the modern world only associate prophets with predictions of the future. But the actual literal definition of what a prophet is, he is a person first of all set apart by God; secondly a person to share a word that needs to be heard. Sometimes that word needs to be heard quietly, sometimes it needs to be heard loudly, sometimes it involves something about the future, but often times it concerns the here and now-right in our faces.

Why was Nathan sent to King David on that particular day? What word at perhaps at the risk of his own life, Nathan was compelled to share with King David on that occasion? I think that most of us have heard the story. How King David became obsessed with beautiful Bathsheba as she bathed on a roof one day and how finally he persuaded her to take up a relationship with him. And the ultimate insult, how he sealed the deal and how he tried to cover his tracks by putting Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, the Hittite, on the front line in battle knowing good and well that he certainly would be killed that day.

It is really quite a distressing story as you read it but one that proves an important point, that God can use even an ungodly man like King David, who was extremely human and he flipped off his pedestal a number of times during the course of his life. Surprisingly, Nathan did not get on a soapbox and he did not scream at David like we might expect. Instead he, kind of sucked David in, hook,

line, and sinker by telling him a story; by telling him a parable about a poor man; by telling him a story about a poor man and his little sheep.

It seems there was this rich man with many flocks, many herds and the poor man with only one cherished little lamb living in the same city. The poor man really cherished that little lamb and treated it as a pet, almost like a child, it said. He even let it drink from his cup it said; I am not going that far even with my dog. He loved his lamb. And one day the rich man had to feed an out of town guest and he was not going to use his own livestock, so, in essence, he stole the poor man's cherished little lamb; he killed it and fed it to his guests.

By the time in the story when it came to this, David was livid; he was angry enough to spit nails and he told Nathan to reveal the identity of the rich man so the poor man would get some justice from his king. Instead, Nathan turns the tables on David. He pointed a finger at him and he pointed out, in essence, the unjust man is YOU King David. Like the rich man in the story David had taken Uriah's one bright spot in life, his beautiful wife Bathsheba. The good news is that God was able to use this travesty of justice to a good purpose by allowing Bathsheba to bear David's son Solomon, who eventually would carry on the family line, and who eventually would build a temple in Jerusalem. The bad news is David and his wife Bathsheba suffered the grief of losing a child prior of the birth of Solomon.

What might we learn from this episode in the life of King David?

First, I think we can learn the lesson that I just shared with you, that God can take the worst situations and turn them to God's good purposes –disasters, injustice that we just read about, even death. And similarly, God can use whomever God wants, rich or poor, righteous or flawed, weak or strong, old or young, female or male to serve God's good purpose in the world around us.

But beyond that, what can we learn as followers of Jesus about our life of faith from actions of these two characters interacting in this passage, David and Nathan. First I think the most obvious lesson comes from David aimed at his blessed and privileged and power that he experienced as King. The lesson is this we are never to use any advantage, we are never to use any power that we have in life to hurt another person. In fact we are asked to be proactive in using the blessings and the privileges we have in life to help those all around us.

What about Nathan the prophet, I think that this character teaches us we cannot stand idly by when we know somebody is being wronged and we know that somebody is being hurt in life. We are in fact asked to speak; we are to act whether it is convenient or not, in the midst of these things. Nathan took an additional risk with David. He not only spoke the truth, he spoke the truth with power in the face of possibility of losing everything; in the face of possibility of losing his very life. He spoke the truth with power and rather than screaming,

rather than preaching, rather than in getting in King David's face; rather than calling a press conference on CNN, he was wise in his action in allowing his king to draw his own conclusion and in a sense point his finger back at himself in the long run.

So, once again, following Jesus is not an easy task, it is not an easy thing for us to choose to follow Jesus nor is it an opportunity neither to judge others nor to take on an attitude to smug self-satisfaction in the rightness of our own thinking. Instead, following the pathway of Jesus can give each one of us an exciting opportunity, an opportunity to make a difference, an opportunity to make a difference even in the circles of great power all around us; an opportunity to make a difference even in the great circles of power to the people and the world all around us. It is a difficult challenge but it is the challenge which I think Nathan and the little lamb give us today. And together we say AMEN.