

Jon Hauerwas – August 5, 2018 – Without Permission
2 Samuel 11:26 – 12:9,13 and Ephesians 4:15-16

My wife had a work colleague in Washington State that I will call Megan. In time, Megan and her husband, who I'll call Steve, left the state to pursue other opportunities. Steve was from was from Idaho. His parents and siblings lived there, and when Steve landed a position as a city manager close to home, the couple was thrilled to relocate. They bought a large, beautiful home. Megan left the workforce and dedicated herself to raising their four children. All seemed well.

And then, it happened. Steve's picture was displayed on the pages of the local news, but not on account of his professional accomplishments. In February, he was arrested for Driving Under the Influence. He resigned from his position with the city. Steve and Megan could no longer afford to keep their home, and the family of six moved in with his sister.

Friends, as we all know well, our decisions have a major impact, not just on ourselves, but on all of those around us. As a result of Steve's mistake, his entire family suffered. It's a tragic story.

David's story, as well, is filled with tragedy. While his faithful soldier, Uriah, is out fighting for the kingdom – and here I should note that Uriah was a Hittite, not

a native Israelite – and yet, he has given his whole life to the kingdom. While Uriah is out fighting for the kingdom, David becomes ensnared by his own passions. He looks out from his palace window to find a beautiful woman bathing. He invites her to his home. He lies with her and she becomes pregnant.

David now has an even bigger problem. What had been secret will now become public. David knew that Bathsheba was a married woman. He knew that her husband was his friend. Still, David joined a long list of powerful people, both before and after, who don't bother to ask for permission. David dictates a solution. When Plan A fails, he moves along to Plan B. He tells Joab, his chief of staff, to send Uriah to the front lines where he will experience the heaviest fighting with the Ammonites. The other soldiers are to withdraw, leaving Uriah vulnerable. In the end, he has no chance of survival. The plot is carried out in accordance with the king's orders. Uriah's fate is sealed.

In short succession, David has now broken three of the 10 Commandments. He has denied God's instructions against coveting, adultery, and murder. Next, David marries Bathsheba and they welcome the child together. However, the child soon dies, foreshadowing death and destruction on many fronts in the line of King

David. Even in the lives of kings, there are consequences. For a time, David is unrepentant.

But, he has a change of heart after hearing a parable, delivered by a prophet named Nathan. A parable is form of indirect communication. Nathan is well aware that, in speaking boldly to power, he could easily lose his life. So he treads lightly. He tells a story. One character is a rather one-dimensional rich man who has everything. Everything. Yet, when a visitor comes to stay with him, he does not wish to part with one of his many lambs. Instead, he takes one from the poor man. It is the only lamb that the poor man owns. It is his prized possession that he has raised from birth and that he treats like a daughter.

The rich man is meant to represent David and the poor man's lamb is meant to represent Bathsheba. But, a parable isn't a perfect correlation. In Nathan's telling, it is the prized sheep who is killed, while in our first lesson, it is Uriah who pays the ultimate price. Jesus also told parables. They used common, everyday occurrences and concepts to communicate a deeper truth about life and God. But, parables are not allegories and we are left to draw our own conclusions.

As king, David is accustomed to presiding over a variety of civic duties, including casting judgment in a court of law. And he wastes no time in casting judgment concerning the rich man in Nathan's parable. David is incensed and insists that the rich man must pay back the poor man's loss fourfold. He also alludes to the ultimate penalty. The rich man must be put to death. Unknowingly, David has implicated himself. This makes possible Nathan's more direct challenge when he asserts, "You are the man." As is common of David, he takes swift action, saying rightly, "I have sinned."

As I said earlier in the children's message, "better late than never" and "the truth shall set you free." There are times, of course, to speak truth to power. We've seen a lot of this lately in the wake of the #MeToo movement. It is an important moment for holding powerful people accountable for their misdeeds. But, there are also moments to speak difficult truths to ourselves.

And so, I invite you to consider both your present and past. Have you ever thought, "How did I get myself in the middle of that?" "How did I flub that up so badly?" "Why did I allow myself to make a mistake like that?" I'm sure that we've all been there at one point or another. Thankfully, there is a way forward.

Earlier this week, I read an article written by Steve, the former city manager who lost his job and home in Idaho following that fateful D.U.I. In his autobiographical retelling, he relayed his own struggle with mental illness, addressed his desire to end the stigma, and outlined the consequences of his own failures. He now serves as an advocate for others who are struggling with similar issues. Steve has found a sacred calling in life. A new shoot is rising up from the stump.

Yes. There is a time and plenty of opportunity to speak truth to power. But, the message for us is not that we all assume the role of the prophet, pointing out the faults and failings of others. Instead, we are called also to see ourselves as David. Taking what we have not earned. Guilty and in need of forgiveness. We won't rush from Good Friday to Easter. There will be consequences for our misdeeds. But, the good news is that God's grace will never let us go and that, no matter our age, no matter our story, we can be born anew. May it be so and all thanks be to God. Amen.