

“Practicing Pentecost: After Consuming”

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2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

Today we pick up where we left off last week after king David takes Bathsheba, gets her pregnant, and has her husband and others killed. David marries Bathsheba, the widow, who is carrying his child, which sets up today’s reading from 2 Samuel. Cue Nathan: Prophet and adviser to David, who enters the story to confront the king concerning his dastardly deeds, and does so in such a clever way. Nathan weaves a story about a rich man who has large flocks and herds, who steals the single lamb of a poor man. At first, David hears the story literally and wants to have the rich man punished. Then Nathan delivers the punch line: “You are the man!” And David is cut to the quick. “The cruel, selfish, rich man is me!” Even with a harem of wives, he takes the one wife of one of his own men. As we decided last Sunday, David had not learned how to adequately contain his capacity for fascination.

Tradition suggests that David repents wholeheartedly for his actions, and it is said that God accepts David’s remorse and forgives him. But the consequences of David’s action cannot be undone. David’s family is plagued with problems, largely because of the forces his evil deeds had put into motion. But David’s dramatic recognition of who he had become, thanks to Nathan’s parable, creates in him a desire to be a different man, a better one, one worthy of forgiveness. To practice Pentecost after conspicuous consumption is to recognize our potential for being bad as well as good, to see ourselves for who and what we can be after we have been less than our best. To practice Pentecost, to participate in the flow of holy Spirit presence and power is to allow our Nathans, in whatever form they come, to cut us to the quick with an honest assessment of what is going on.

Oddly enough, one song in particular seemed to play in my car radio over and over this week. Michael Jackson’s well known “Man in the Mirror.” Can pop music be a kind of Nathan? “Man in the Mirror” is about recognition and honest assessment. “I’m starting with the man in the mirror. I’m asking him to change his ways. And no message could have been any clearer: If you want to make the world a better place take a look at yourself and then make a change.” After consuming? After making a mess of things and recognizing our role in it – what then?

Irish playwright Samuel Beckett once offered this answer: “When you are into crap (he used a different word) up to our ears, there’s nothing left to do but sing.” From what we know about today’s Psalm (51), this is exactly what David did long ago. After consuming, after cobbling up everything Bathsheba and Uriah held dear, David confesses to his longing to be cleansed, restored, sustained with a willing spirit, willing to begin again with a new heart. Perhaps it is time to sing.

(Note: Susan Bjork stood and sang “Create in Me a Clean Heart” from her pew. Very moving!)