

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a
Psalm 51
Ephesians 4:1-16
John 6:24-35

The thing David had done displeased the Lord...

The thing that David had done displeased the Lord, and the Lord sent Nathan to David. At first sight we could be excused for thinking God's displeasure arose because David took Uriah's wife to his house. But *the thing* was much bigger than that. King David had been seduced by power. He coveted Uriah's wife and made her pregnant, arranged for Uriah to die to hide his adultery, and convinced his commanding officer this *thing* was not an evil act. David imagined he had got away with it, but he had not escaped the justice of God. The displeasing *thing* was David had violated Israel's tradition of faith and justice. He had stepped outside the boundaries of being a true shepherd, and had put himself in the place of God.

The Lord sent Nathan to David. It was a dangerous mission. A prophet is a spokesperson who passes on knowledge of the divine will. The prophet does not choose the message, he carries the message for another, and it may be hard to communicate. How does one speak to those in power? How would one go about offering an alternative perception of reality to those who are used to defining reality for themselves? The recipients may not want to hear the message. They may be outraged, and choose to shoot the messenger.

Nathan is no king pleaser; no yes-man. In his eyes the highest in the land is still accountable to God. But he did not deliver a stunning decree of judgement. He used a parable to draw the king in, and it succeeded. Blind to his own connection with the story, David was enraged at the crassness of the rich man who stole the poor man's treasured lamb. Then Nathan lifted back the veil: **You are the man!**

Nathan reminded David that his position and power were gifts of grace. God had chosen him to rule, but he had become a king like all other kings; numbed to death and moral impropriety. He had violated the covenant and spurned the promises of God. The reason Nathan did not lose his head like John the Baptist was because David's political life had not yet totally anaesthetised his finer feelings. Unlike modern leaders who believe admitting a fault is a sign of weakness, David has the courage to own up and cast himself on the mercy of God: **I have sinned!**

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. He who imagined himself as above the law stepped back into the covenant of grace. The proper relationship was restored, but the consequences remained. Uriah did not return from the dead, and these deeds introduced long term troubles that scarred David's family for decades to come. Well might we consider what this means as we watch world leaders engage in actions that violate human law and the justice of God, storing up resentment and hatred for the future. What an old Jesuit once said regarding Ireland is certainly true today: "Once violence gets into the culture, it is very hard to get it out."

Prophetic speech, which delivered a word from outside itself, was fundamental to the life of Israel. Prophets were tolerated, and they were to be heeded as well. Prophecy ensured that God was not a chattel of government who baptized all projects regardless of moral integrity. God was allowed to be other than the powers of earth. God was respected as one who offers an alternative construct of reality, with possibilities outside those driven by our desires. Living in the light of the blessings of Almighty God, as the Australian Constitution says we do, means there may be something we citizens are called to do which is contrary to the will of the nation. David could have eliminated the one who brought him a prophetic message, or marginalised him in some sort of living death. But David was big enough to see that his actions were an abrogation of the promises of God. He had the courage to repent. How good it would be if our leaders were able to be appalled at the crassness of the rich and the powerful, and committed to cease robbing the poor of the treasure of life.

The world today has made a division between the church and the state, silencing or marginalising the prophetic voice. Most rulers have given up the idea that there is a bigger frame reference outside globalization or the free market. Such talk as there is of God usually refers to faith that has been co-opted for self-centred purposes. And it is clear our leaders do not want to hear contrary voices. In this environment delivering a Godly word of criticism or correction is a challenging task, but it is legitimately part of the church's role in society, even if society chooses not to see it that way. It is good to see that the Overseas Aid Agencies of the Churches, and others, have called on the Prime Minister to add his voice to those who call for a ceasefire in the Middle East.

Walter Brueggemann says prophetic ministry does not have to involve spectacular acts of social crusading. Rather, it means offering an alternative perception of reality - a contrary narrative - to the world. That is why the prophetic voice will often raise concern for the poor.

In the gospel the crowd ask Jesus what they must do to perform the works of God. He replies: **believe in the one whom God has sent.** The Lord sent Nathan to David, and Jesus has been sent to us, to show us the way to life. Those who belong to Jesus share in a community which lives according to a contrary narrative. Every member of the body of Christ is nurtured in, and called to live from, a reality that is different from the norm. In that sense the Church is a prophetic community.

How do we exercise a prophetic ministry? Firstly, by being here. The fact that we gather in this way week by week, speaks to the world around us. People look at the church with disdain, but all who come here help to **keep the rumour of God alive**, a sign there is another way.

Secondly we offer an alternative perception of reality in the way we reach out. As Hotham mission we engage our resources for the benefit of others in a totally different way than would be chosen by government, or a profit based company. Endeavours like the Asylum Seeker Project make room for those without resources, who are marginalised and under pressure. This itself is a prophetic statement.

Nathan's visit to David arose from the death of only one man. Today is Hiroshima day, and the memorial at Hiroshima commemorates the destruction 200,000 lives. We are aware of the human tendency to destructive and wasteful ways, and we fear there might

be an even greater conflagration in the Middle East. On Hiroshima Day we are challenged not to allow ourselves to be numbed by the constant assault death and dehumanisation make on our lives. Our world is scarred by nuclear energy. The gift of nuclear power has been employed for destructive purposes and genie is out of the bottle. We are here to remember that the gifts of God are for life, not death, and a different path needs to be taken.

As Australians we still have God in our constitution. Does this mean like David, we have the inklings of a conscience left? It may be that God will call people with a particular message to deliver in our day. In the meantime our role as church is to believe in the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life. The meal we share in his name is a sign of the alternative reality in which we live. At this table none are higher than others. In this meal we all receive the same, and we all receive what we need. The food he gives us is more than bread; it is food for our souls: life itself. Life that is not self constructed, but is rooted and grounded in the gifts of God to all people. In this grace we may freely live, and are called to make ways for others to do the same.