

“The Understatement of the Year”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

August 1, 2021 – Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a; John 6:24-35

“I have sinned against the LORD,” David said to the prophet Nathaniel. That little line likely could have been awarded the title of “The Understatement of the Year.” Yes, David did sin against the Holy One of Israel, but David’s actions, which we read about in last Sunday’s lesson from 2 Samuel, went way beyond just being a sin against God. By sleeping with Bathsheba and then murdering her husband when David learned she was pregnant with his child, David’s terrible sin caused death, damage, and destruction to others. He sinned against God, against Bathsheba, against her husband Uriah, against the people he led and over whom he had power, against their society and its standards for peaceful living, and against himself. And for what? To satisfy his selfish desire in a moment.

I believe that the writers of 2 Samuel, and those who gathered all the material that found its way into the Hebrew Bible, included the story of David’s dastardly deeds, giving their great national hero an eternal black eye, because they wanted the hearers and readers of these sacred words to be reminded that even the greatest among us falter and fail and sometimes even cause others to suffer terribly. Even the great King David, “a man after God’s own heart,” was deeply in need of God’s mercy and God’s grace. While David would suffer terrible consequences because of his actions, just as others suffered because of them, he was offered mercy and grace by God.

Even at our worst, God loves us and is gracious unto us. This is a lesson repeated over and over again in our Bible. In its first pages, we told the story of Adam and Eve, the first people, and how they chose to defy God and satisfy themselves, but while they suffered greatly because of this, God still loved them and provided for them. And in the last of the Bible’s pages, we read of a loving and gracious God looking beyond all in humanity that has rightly provoked God’s wrath and providing people with a renewed heaven and earth, where a river of mercy and grace streams from the presence of God and perfectly satisfies and nourishes all.

Today's gospel lesson from John, the second of a six-week departure from the gospel of Mark, through which we have been reading this year, also teaches us about God's gracious provision. Jesus teaches us in our lesson that he is the Bread of Life, the source of sustenance for our souls, the one who can satisfy the deepest longing of those who have been hungering and thirsting for God's peace ever since peace between God and people was broken in the garden. The stuff we think will bring us peace--gaining power and money and satisfying every urge of our bodies--does not bring us lasting peace. Acting on our desires may bring food for a moment, but we are left unfilled and unfulfilled. Jesus, the Bread of Life, provides an alternative path, a way of life that truly fulfills and satisfies.

And so we come to the Bread of Life, and find in our fellowship with Christ, renewed fellowship with God, the source of life and sustainer of all that is living. And we find in following the way of Jesus, of selflessly serving others rather than selfishly taking from them, true peace that endures.

This is what we remember and celebrate in the sacrament of communion, which we shall share this morning. As we take within our own bodies the Bread of Life, we receive within ourselves the selfless way of Jesus. It becomes part of us, our own way, and brings us peace.

So let us, this day and every day, receive this gift of God. Let us turn from selfishness and sin, that leads only to the low valley of destruction, and turn towards Christ and the selfless way that leads to the heights, where we will enjoy blessings of true life now and forever. Amen.