

“WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW IS... TRUTH”

II Samuel 12:1-7a; Ephesians 4:14-16

July 3, 2016 – Rev. Jerry Duggins

You know the story. David is out for a walk on the rooftop when he spots Bathsheba. He likes what he sees, so he sends for her. She's married, of course, but this is not a problem for kings. She becomes pregnant, also not a problem for kings, except that her husband is away fighting one of David's wars. So everyone will know. Apparently David liked Bathsheba because he tries to save her some embarrassment by recalling her husband, so that there can at least be the impression that the child belongs to Uriah. Except Uriah not only refuses to sleep with his wife, but makes a show of not sleeping with her, muttering something about solidarity with the troops on the front line.

So David arranges the death of Uriah with his captain, an honorable death in the line of battle. To adultery, he adds murder. I suspect this is not an unusual occurrence among kings, but David is very secretive about it. One lie leads to another leads to another. The whole story is a series of pretenses.

Everyone must have known what David had done. Most kings wouldn't have bothered with the secrecy. Though he knows it, David acts as if Bathsheba were not married. Then he attempts to create the false impression that the child will be Uriah's, but Uriah refuses to play along. So he makes murder look like a courageous sacrifice. Uriah is honored and David relieves Bathsheba of the burden of widowhood. Kings do these sorts of things.

This story could easily have been the inspiration for *House of Cards* where Frank and Clare Underwood use lies, adultery and murder to gain the presidency. Even when they tell the truth, it seems only to disguise an even more horrible lie. Three thousand years after David, political corruption ceases to surprise us. Every campaign speech is followed by the media fact checkers. Even the news itself comes with its own spin.

Lies, of course, are not the exclusive property of domestic and global politics. We have been regularly exposed to distortions and deceptions in the advertising industry, from the unconscionable failure of the tobacco companies to inform the about the health hazards of smoking for so many years to the more innocent inference that the sexy woman comes with the sleek and expensive car.

We see it in relationships: trying to make a good impression in the early dating days, later on, hiding indiscretions. Children lie to their parents, parents to children; There are lies even between friends. We even lie to ourselves about things we don't want to believe.

More important perhaps than the multitude of ways in which we experience lies is the impact those lies have had on us. People around the world have grown more suspicious, less able to trust over the years. We not only don't believe everything we're

told, some of us don't believe *anything* we're told. There are some who believe that the moon landing, the holocaust, even the recent shootings in Orlando were a hoax. Most people don't credit this, but it's indicative of the extent to which we have come to disbelieve what we're told.

So... David's behavior here doesn't surprise us. We've seen people caught up in a web of lies before. We are probably expecting him to get away with it... until "the Lord sent Nathan to David." The truth is about to be spoken.

But before we get to that, we need two more pieces of background. Let me put the first in the form of a question. How is it that David, who behaves as badly in this story as any other king of Israel, becomes the standard against which all other kings are measured? In fact the future messiah is depicted as one who is after the heart of David.

Second, David did not inherit the throne. He got there not because he was next in line, but because he was mighty in battle, loyal to his men and loved by the people. He got there because he was honest and had integrity. His treatment of Bathsheba and Uriah, in other words, was out of character.

So the Lord sent Nathan to David, not to condemn David, but to call him back, and the way back begins with the truth (something which prophets are good at). Nathan knows just the right approach. He does not, like all the other prophets, march into the throne room and tell the king what he has done wrong. Instead, he relies on David coming back to himself, to his sense of justice and finally on David's integrity. The truth which David sees easily in the story, that the rich man has done an injustice to the poor man, opens his eyes to the truth in his own life. "You are the man!" Nathan says to David.

The truth restores David. It doesn't save the child born from his lies. It doesn't forestall the tragedies yet to come in his future as his sons lust for the throne themselves. But it does give him the strength to struggle even with God for the life of that child who is not to blame for David's indiscretions. It strengthens his resolve to forgive rather than condemn his son Absalom; to offer mercy in the place of execution.

We could use some truth today and some wise people like Nathan who know how to speak the truth in ways that it can be heard. On the night of Jesus' arrest, he makes a rather lengthy speech to the disciples. In the first part of that speech, John tells us that Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." I've never thought much about the order of those words, but they make a certain sense. They suggest that the way to life passes through truth... the way... to life... passes through truth.

The only way through the lies, deceptions, and misunderstandings begins with acknowledging the truth. We don't experience forgiveness without first confessing. We can't find healing for our relationships without first seeing the brokenness.

It's commonly said that there is no peace without justice. One might add that there is no justice without truth. Part of the process for dismantling apartheid was the establishment

of a “truth and reconciliation committee.” The perpetrators of injustice were invited to confess their atrocities before the committee and in the presence of those whom they had harmed. Some form of restitution and forgiveness often followed. Truth was the medium through which the country could move through healing and the making of a new society.

By the same token, the strongest movements toward peace in the Middle East are occurring where Palestinians and Israelis gather not to pound out another compromise, but to hear each other speak their truth. The only path to peace will begin with a commitment to tell the truth.

Here are some things that speaking the truth, with love as Ephesians tells us, can do for the world and for us.

Truth-telling could begin the process of healing the rifts between nations. It could open up a process for appreciating the differences that have historically divided peoples, races and genders. Truth-telling is essential to an effective and just negotiating process, whether between labor and management or with a couple working through divorce. Truth-telling is an invitation to a conversation about forgiveness.

The truth is essential to healthy societies and individuals. Finding ways to speak it in love can only improve the world, our relationships, and ourselves. There are times when the truth is difficult, times when it is controversial, times even when it has been cruelly told.

But attention to the truth informs our mission to the world, calls us to acts of justice and kindness, restores the prodigal, and brings peace to the soul. The truth helps us to grow in faith, to let go of childish notions, to recognize the lies and deceptions that divide us, and to see in Christ the persons we are called to be. The truth invites us to use our unique gifts and abilities for the common good. The truth builds us up rather than tears us down or apart.

As with David, the truth calls us back to our original selves, reminding us who we are and whose we are. Truth tells us that we are God’s and that we are made for one another.

As we look at the world and our individual lives, things may not seem quite so good as we would wish, but truth sets us on the path to make it so. Truth sets us on the path of life in all its goodness. May God give us courage to seek it out, to practice it in our life and faith, and to do so with all gentleness and love. Amen.