

Hey: This past week there is a certain song that I can't seem to get out of my mind. It's a popular one, a favorite among music students and slow dances alike. Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah. I believe it has come to mind due to the lyrics being about David and other major Jewish biblical heroes. For me the song always represented a love story, but I never really gave careful thought to the story the song is sharing. It's a sad song. It's about heartbreak, loss of trust and passion between couples. But really, it is a story of Cohen lamenting directly to God.

The verse that really captivated me and if honest reminded me most of David and his psalms is verse 5: "you say I took the name in vain/I don't even know the name. But if I did, well really, what's it to you?/There's a blaze of light in every word/It doesn't matter what you heard/the holy or the broken Hallelujah. The seeping in of my previous happy thoughts about this song, call it the holy Hallelujah with the sadness of it all, the broken hallelujah has caused some tension for me in how I thought of it.

You: Joy. Peace. Hope. Comfort. Stability. Friendship. Kindness. Holy. These are handful of words that come to mind when I think of words that people think of when it comes to church, religion, faith and God and the like. Monotony. Lonely. Used. Hurt. Sadness. Broken. These words, surely not as positive are ones that I hear most from people that are going through some sort of crisis with work, home or meaning. When these types of words ink their way into our faith it can cause some tension. Some contradiction.

We like to believe that when life gets crazy and scary and we don't know where to turn that we can flip open the bible to any random page and decipher from it words of wisdom. Words of peace. Words of direction. The word of God. But what happens if we flip to the stories of war? Of famine? Of rape? Of murder? It is easy to pass those off as just "bad people" but what happens when a bad event happens from a "good person?" It can be devastating to our faith, to belief that being a follower of God can make us good people.

Look: That is what I see today in our texts. These two scriptures are King David in two very different places. In one place, the psalm, you can imagine him scribbling at his desk after a wonderful day of temple worship when he is feeling all holy and righteous and wonderful. He probably hears the news updates from the town crier sharing similar things we hear about now. People slandering other people, crime updates and the panic of the financial market.

David feels a tension in his faith and what he hears and so he writes this psalm criticizing the world around him "are any of these people good?! Is there no one in

the world that does the will of God?! God is with the righteous, such as people like myself. Etc. etc. etc.” but then in our second reading we get the story of David and Bathsheba. A story of rape. Of murder by this holy and righteous king. One of the gifts of scripture is that it is daringly honest.

The authors are unafraid to shine a light into the darkness and even the hypocrisy of even its heroes. Their honesty rests in their freedom to not be defensive about the characters that they are writing about. Because even the main characters are not THE main character. The main character is about God. This is God’s story not David’s story. Because of that they are less defensive about the hero David. Their primary goal is to reveal a little something about the nature of God and tell us who God is. The main actor gets to work with these very fallible other actors and the main actor still gets it done; it’s pretty cool. The story is always and everywhere about God primarily.

The extend that we realize that the less we will be defensive about ourselves and others as well. The less defensive we are the more truthful we might be. Scripture is the window into the lives of others. Because of that we are better at seeing the speck in their eyes and not the logs in our own. The gift of scripture is to see God, see others and to see ourselves. The first thing I notice about the Samuel passage is this: the personal and political, the secret and the public are linked. A lack of integrity in our life will seep, seep into every other area of our life. A betrayal of values will undermine those same values in another. In David’s case the board room, the bed room and the battlefield all have interleading doors.

I think our age is especially prone to living segmented lives. Values that we honor that hold us accountable in our home -- those values don’t always apply at our place of work. In fact if we had to apply our home values to work it would be bad business. Not always but in some cases. We are told to be generous at home but greedy at work. Patient at home but ruthless at work, not explicitly but sometimes. Altruistic at home and dog-eat-dog at work. You get the idea. You can’t undermine areas in one area and think they won’t be undervalued in another.

The thing I notice is it helps us get a little idea about what is “sin”. It’s a little word with a lot of meaning. I guess sin has always had a bad rap but part of that is because it has been incorrectly used. Often used around some kind of cultural moralism. The culture determined by the powerful name certain things as wrong and that takes on the meaning of sin.

But sin really is doing life in deathly ways. To demean life. To damage life. To destroy life. To live life as if we were separate from God. That is the way of sin. The

way of sin is the way of death which is the opposite to life. Jesus on the other hand is the opposite to that. That is why Jesus says he is the way, the truth, the life. Jesus lives life in a way that produces and encourages life. Sin divides and if it is unchecked it will destroy everything that it touches whereas the opposite of that is love. Love unites and by uniting it transforms everything it unites.

In the text we are going to see the sin of David, the demeaning of life, the using of life for himself. Then we are going to see something develop. Not only does he sin initially in the act but then he tries to cover it up so he continues to sin. What then is sin? Something that divides and if left unchecked it will destroy everything it touches. The text is honest. It reveals the human condition.

The pull of truth is deeper still. Because how things are named and framed matter. How we name a situation is not neutral. It depends on what angle we are coming at. Here is an example, in the bible that I have it is titled David commits adultery with Bathsheba. Now...sure it features adultery, but not just adultery. If Bathsheba had the privilege of giving the story a title she might have said "the day Bathsheba was raped by King David."

The rape narrative is certainly what the prophet Nathan surely picks up and shares to David, God and the world in the next chapter. Or Uriah, if he had the privilege of titling the event he might have called it "the day David put out a hit on me." In other words we aren't just dealing with adultery, and to say we are only looking at adultery ignores the full truth of the text. If we are going to learn the lessons from the text we must learn more than to not sleep with another person's spouse as that is not the primary lesson.

The primary lesson I believe is how we deal with our power. Our power. Now you might say "I don't think I am very a powerful person. What power?" The text can help us discern what power. If you read that text slowly again you will notice there are at least 8 times where David is directing another person's life. Let me go through them quickly with you. David **sent** Joab, David **sent** messengers to discover who Bathsheba is, David **sent** messengers to **get** Bathsheba, David **sent** word to Joab, Joab **sent** Uriah home to David, **remain here today** Uriah, David **sends a letter** with Uriah. David is doing a lot of pushing. He sends people and he summons.

So the question that is begging of us is: Who do you send? Who do you summon? Who do you email? If you have anybody that you are able to send or to summon than you have some power. Every parent has power. Now sure, some of us have far more power than others but let us not fall into the trap of denying our own power in the shadow of another's power. Let's see how this develops for David.

Power is color coated. Race coated. Nationality coated. Gender coated. So David lives in a world where men have more power than women. Where Israelites have more power than Hittites. It's just there. It exists. It exists by religion and law.

In other words there are cultural power differentials in the story. The second thing we notice is that David sets himself apart. Alone. Above. We read in the text "in the time when all other kings went to war" that's just what you did in the summertime. You went to war. But not David. No, David said "Nah, I'm different." The moment exceptionalism creeps into ones being. I'm different. I'm not like the other kings. I don't have to go to battle. That sense of entitlement means that he is on a slippery slope of sin. So he remains behind, alone, above, apart from others. While others are at the battle David is on the couch. When you and I are not doing what we should be doing it is at that moment we are most prone to the abuse of our power.

Please notice, Bathsheba is not powerless, almost powerless but not entirely. She conceives and in the text we read "she **sent** for and told David." With the one little power she has she sends a message. She is brave. The king can do what he wants but I am going to present the king with the consequences of who he is. That's courage. Now Uriah comes home because he was sent home and David commands him to go home to lie with Bathsheba and he refuses. Civil disobedience. That's courage.

When David challenges him listen to the voice of Uriah "the ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths and my lord Joab and the servants of the Lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will do no such thing." In other words, there is no way I am going to obey you, my king. He is also likely bringing to voice some of the grumblings of the soldiers who are likely saying "are we the only ones out here without our king?" the word surely gets out.

Uriah has the courage to name it. He speaks out of an integrity that should have been the kings from the beginning. And he gives David that moment where he should say "you're right." But David chooses instead to cover up. He turns bad. Power is not necessarily bad. But there is something about power that corrupts. We know how it goes. Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely. It seems that our power to do good can easily morph into our power to dominate. Our power over others. This is especially true in religious institutions. Why?

Because we are less prone to be honest with who has power. You see in the business world we know it has power. You walk into the building with your eyes

open and you can deal with it but here in the church it is about love. Love, not power. Listen to what a sociologist says about power “whenever you are in a place where nobody is talking about power that is unquestionably where it exists. Once secure and great in it’s subtly but once brought to the light and the topic of it is questioned that is the beginning of its decline.”

That is what Uriah and Bathsheba have done to David. They called out the power and the power surely begins to fall. And when it falls who once more take the reins of power for the remainder of David’s life? God. Once more our hero returns to God.

That’s the beauty of God’s grace. You see if sin, as we’ve described it as a modem of death than God’s grace is a conduit of life. So when we sin, when power has corrupted us we are forgiven people and that is a beautiful, wonderful, indescribable thing. But David’s redemption is not the only part of this story. Just as the adultery was only a part, it ignored the rape and the deception.

Our own redemption when we sin is part of the story but not all of it. The people we hurt along the way in our conquest of power will remain hurt. Bathsheba lives the rest of her life with David. Her first child dies and it was by God’s hand. David’s daughter Tamar is raped by her brother Amnon. Countless soldiers died in David’s cover up including Uriah. So yes, this is a story of God’s redemption, a story of redemption that still is being told in our lives today for God is the main character and we like David are only supporting actors.

But in that story and in ours involve a great deal of heartbreak. Some we have received. Some we have caused. That is what it means to have a broken and a holy Hallelujah. That in times of redemption and forgiveness we can proclaim God is good, but even in our times when we receive heartbreak we need to be able to say God is good. This time with David is a window into our own hearts. Let us not point fingers at David, but rather point to God and say “you are the one who is now in control.” Please rise as you able in mind body and spirit and give it back to God. Give the power. Give the control and proclaim in here my sisters and my brothers that God is in control. Let it be so. AMEN.