

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost: July 25, 2021

“Resilience”

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Good morning everyone. I don't know about your week, but I can tell you this past week for me has been a busy one. I thank everyone who made the work I needed to do possible, and for those who assisted during yesterday's baptism, it was a lovely service.

Maybe it is because my week was busy, or possibly because I have spent a lot of time with our Jewish neighbors, but today I want to talk about our Old Testament scripture and resilience. There are so many ways to look at our Old Testament reading about David, and I must admit I have heard a lot of them that focus on David, on lust, and on the planning to have a husband killed.

But today, I am going to change the focus to the feminine, something I see sometimes lurking right in front of my eyes, but then often miss. We are going to talk about Bathsheba.

In the Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish women there are several nuances brought forward. Their readings clearly emphasize that Bathsheba was never held guilty for her participation in the affair with David. In fact, some Rabbis feel Bathsheba was chosen for David by God because she would be a good influence on him and eventually bear Solomon.

However when we read between the lines, it is very possible this is the beginning of what we would call today a “Me Too” story, which through the struggle created an amazingly strong and admired Queen who was then able to influence her son, the young king Solomon.

It makes one wonder if at the time of David (who himself had many wives and concubines) there was an unspoken forgiveness given to those women found in a compromised way. So let's do some clarification.

Some rabbis feel that Bathsheba was chosen for David, yet David, "enjoyed her as an unripe fruit," that is, he lay with her before the proper time, when the fruit was still unripe. Meaning David did not wait for God to present the correct arrangement for him to meet his future queen but rather took things into his own hands.

Continuing on that note, there are rabbinical additions to the story that say Bathsheba was washing under a covering however a bird appeared and Satan - or the Evil one - took over the bird who began annoying David on the rooftop. David then shot an arrow at the bird and missed. The bird flew away, Bathsheba's covering, being hit by the arrow, came down and the affair begins.

What we do not have in the story is Bathsheba's version, but we do have a general opinion that she is innocent. That leads me to believe there is reason to wonder about rape. Women at that time were property and for a king, the more wives, the more esteem you have.

The author only gives Bathsheba one line "I am pregnant" and speaks of her in the third person. She seems to be completely passive, quiet, small, and insignificant. And if the untold story is the one with a covering being removed by accidental means, again, she is passive and not even responsible for bathing out in the open. That was, perhaps, not her original intention. You have to love the Old Testament, it is just one long soap opera!

Bathsheba's name only occurs once, otherwise she is referred to as the wife of the Hittite, and later she becomes David's wife. Other references have her as "she", "her" or just "woman". A woman almost without name, represented as passive.

Even the loss of her child, as the story continues, is more focused on Yahweh and David's grief, without much mention of Bathsheba's struggles.

So, let's recap for a moment here. We have a young woman who was married to a soldier who was away a lot and fighting – eventually ending up at the front. She is already property, and is taking a ritual cleansing bath when she enters into an affair – possibly unwillingly. Next she loses her child, and through it all, she is just, well, “she, her, or the woman.”

But that's not the end of the story. Bathsheba bears another son, Solomon, who she continues to influence even after David's death. When the readings turn into 1st Kings, we have a portrait of her as a strong and active favorite wife and queen mother. What happened?

For over 20 years Bathsheba has been at court as David's wife and the mother of his sons. Over these years she has developed courage, confidence and a voice, she speaks! Adele Berlin, a Jewish scholar writes:

“If Bathsheba is portrayed as passive in her early relationship with David, she becomes strongly active toward the end of David's life in her successful attempt to ensure that her son Solomon will inherit the throne.”

It is so easy to say to someone who is struggling that the struggle won't last forever, or that there is justice around the corner, or that God has a purpose for their pain. But many times, when we are in the midst of struggle, we cannot hear those words. God knows this. The rabbis know this. Our scriptures, that contain what we need to know to live into our salvation, know this. There are many hidden gems.

What we have in the background of the Bathsheba story is resilience. Although I have focused on Bathsheba and her story as a woman, gender is not the issue here. What is important is this amazing example of finding one's voice and place in life, especially if

you find yourself in the compromised category. This story is only the beginning as we are only reading about Bathsheba, the passive one.

But that's not the end of the story. I remind you of this because if you are struggling, or have come to a place where you are realizing you have a voice, or maybe you are in the honored position now to be comfortable and wise, still the story of God working in your life is not over.

I guarantee you, that if you reflect on your life you will find the times you were resilient, the times you made it work, the day you gave it your all. We all must continue that, because if scripture is our example, then God knows what you are going through, and God will make meaning out of the experience. If you find your voice, God will give it strength, if you can go one step further, God will send you help.

I know if you are like me, you are probably very tired of the pandemic still raging on and all the precautions we have to continue to take. I also know some of you may be cutting out things in your life that may put you at COVID risk. Others of you may be venturing out for the first times and feeling a little wary.

Some may not know what the future holds and find themselves anxious.

Let's look at our Bathsheba story today - this day, when we may be feeling passive, victimized, or maybe innocent but still accused. Let us see the growth that happened for this young beautiful woman, who through her struggles became the Queen Mother to the young king Solomon. An example of pure resilience.

Our scriptures contain so many secrets, and although we often focus on the main characters, God also works behind the scenes creating resilience for those who suffer. Whether protagonist, victim, or bystander, God knows you are there, always offering resilience - and then the rest of the story. Amen