

The Lessons Appointed for Use on
the

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 6

Year C

RCL



2 Samuel 11:26-12:10,13-15

Psalm 5:1-8

Luke 7:36-8:3

The Collect

Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

2 Samuel 11:26-12:10,13-15

When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.

But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to pre-

pare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the

sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.”

David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Nathan said to David, “Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die.” Then Nathan went to his house. The Lord struck the child that Uriah’s wife bore to David, and it became very ill.

Psalm 5:1-8

Verba mea auribus

1 Give ear to my words, O Lord; *

consider my meditation.

2 Hearken to my cry for help, my King and my God, *

for I make my prayer to you.

3 In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; *

early in the morning I make my appeal and watch for you.

4 For you are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, *

and evil cannot dwell with you.

5 Braggarts cannot stand in your sight; *

you hate all those who work wickedness.

6 You destroy those who speak lies; *

the bloodthirsty and deceitful, O Lord, you abhor.

7 But as for me, through the greatness of your mercy I will go into your house; *

I will bow down toward your holy temple in awe of you.

8 Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness,

because of those who lie in wait for me; *

make your way straight before me.

Luke 7:36-8:3

one of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him – that she is a sinner." Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "Speak." "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed

five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?” Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt.” And Jesus said to him, “You have judged rightly.” Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.” Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” But those who were at the table with him began to say among

themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

SERMON

Anybody ever had allergy shots? The idea is that through exposure to small, injected amounts of an allergen, in gradually increasing doses, your body builds up immunity to it. That's remarkable! We inject people with something their body sees as poison so that they can come to accept the poison without doing any harm. For all I know, that might be a good thing if you are allergic to peanuts. In our spiritual lives, I'm not convinced that this is a good idea at all, for there IS one kind of poison we feed ourselves each day because we HAVE developed an immunity to it. It is the poison of self-righteousness, and boy! do we love it! Self-righteousness whispers in our ear that people who are like me are good people and people who are not like me are to be feared. (It's why I'm such an unabashed fan of the President. I see him as well educated, discerning, articu-

late and very good looking – just like me.) At its heart, self-righteousness is the notion, so sweet on the tongue, that when Paul wrote:

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,¹

he was speaking of the other people, the ones not like us.

We get a great account of the poison of self-righteousness in the story of David's shameful relations with Uriah the Hittite and his wife, Bathsheba. You'll recall that David engaged in a little window peeping and saw her bathing. He thought she was all that and more, but her marital status was a problem, so David arranged a widowhood for her.

When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and

¹ Romans 3:23

brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.

This is DAVID we're talking about. King David, the man Samuel spoke of to Saul:

The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people²

Luke, writing in the Book of Acts, repeats this judgment

And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.'³

If anyone in the First Testament has claim to self-righteousness, you would think it would be David, a man after God's own heart, but you would be wrong. Nathan confronted him with the story we heard today,

² 1 Samuel 13:14

³ Acts 13:22

of a poor man with only a single ewe lamb. Nathan chose his story well, because David promptly climbed onto his self-righteous horse and proclaimed judgment.

Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

David is clueless to the evil within him which lead him to so awful an act, so Nathan must drive home the dagger.

Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. You are the man! Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what

is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife...”

It's not hard to trace the line of David's reasoning. I am king. I am so because God found me to be a man after His own heart. That makes me special. The things that special people do are special, too, so sending Uriah off to get killed is a special kind of thing, and anyway, he's not of the house of Israel – he's a Hittite.

Did you ever have one of those discussions with yourself in which you convince yourself that whatever bad idea you just had is the right and proper thing to do because you're special? Yeah....me, too. That's what we call self-righteousness – granting something to ourselves to which we are not entitled – the stamp of righteousness. When God describes David's actions as having despised Him, he pulls no punches. Self-righteous-

ness removes God from the center of our lives and substitutes “special us”. That’s why I and the Presbyterian Church put such great emphasis on the time of confession each Sunday. In the story from the Gospel, the woman loved much because she knew how great were her sins which Jesus forgave. It’s vital to recognize poison as poison, particularly the poisons to which you have granted yourself immunity. It’s vital to confront those forces within us which whisper that we’re special. If David, a man after God’s own heart, can confess:

David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

then we should be ashamed not to do likewise. “Special us” is not in any way special and God is not to be removed from His throne. Doing so has consequences.

Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me,

and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.

When we allow our own judgment, our own well-loved ideas of right and wrong, our tribal notions of correctness, to govern our actions instead of submitting to God, there will be consequences.

We are engaged in a great struggle with what we are pleased to call “radical Islam”. That struggle came into sharp focus this week in Orlando. The conversations have spun around whether or not the President should use the term “radical Islam” in describing this attack. That assessment comes from our general misunderstanding of what is going on in the middle East. Al-Jazeera reports:

As details of the worst mass shooting in US history emerged, FBI Director James Comey said on Monday that the suspect, identified as 29-year-old Omar Mateen, had not only

pledged loyalty to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS), but also expressed solidarity with the Tsarnaev brothers who carried out the Boston Marathon bombing and a suicide bomber who died on behalf of the al-Nusra Front, a group at odds with ISIL.

The gunman had called 911 during the attack at the Pulse nightclub early on Sunday to express his allegiance to ISIL.

But Comey - who believed Mateen had “strong signs of radicalisation” - said that in the past few years, the gunman also expressed support for both al-Qaeda and Hezbollah.

Omar Mateen was an American, born here. His confusion is our confusion. Expressing support for ISIL, al-Qaeda, the al-Nusra Front and Hezbollah, an incoherent grouping of different, and sometimes hostile, groups is akin to someone during the Second World War supporting both the Allies and the Axis. It makes no sense. It

simply expresses the confusion that often drives our responses.

It is beginning to appear that Omar Mateen was a man struggling with his sexuality. He may have grouped this bunch of names he had found on the Internet together into an umbrella of self-righteousness rather than to face up to the issue which was really bothering him. He wouldn't be the first to do this.

Here's where I stop preaching and start meddling. If you are urged by politicians or others to wage war on "radical Islam", lumping all these disparate groups beneath a single banner, you are sending Uriah to certain death and doing it from your over-weening sense of self-righteousness. The most important piece of information in any conflict is to know your enemy. Flailing out mindlessly at everyone near you who is not like you will not bring an end to conflict. It will assure, however,

that the sword will never leave your house.

To be a faithful Christian is to acknowledge God as the center of your life. To be a faithful Christian is to be an submissive disciple. To be a faithful Christian is to attend to the Word of God, which is Jesus Christ, and to a life centered on prayer. Anything else is arrogant self-righteousness.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

My teacher, the Rev. Dr. Lon Oliver, recently said:

If you are more committed to your money, your home, your guns, or your job than to God—pray. God can change priorities even before we know they need changing. If you are feeling helpless in the face of so much hate and gridlock—pray. God is always working for peace with justice even when it seems the vineyard is empty of workers. If you are feeling justified over those you believe stand in opposition to your remedies—pray. Humility and discernment must accompany our prophetic rage and actions. If you are only reading BLOGS and commentary you agree with—pray. It is easy to miss paths to justice and peace that may be different from our own. (God loves to surprise us with new possibilities.) If you are only seeking legislative and ecclesiastical solutions to equal rights, justice and safety—pray. God sometimes bypasses institutions—even those close to God’s heart. Prayer helps us to see God at work outside the places we might ex-

pect.⁴

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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⁴ Rev. Lon Oliver