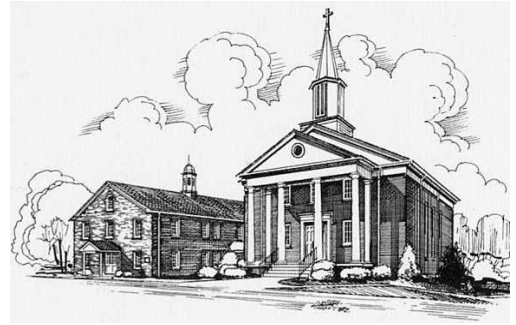


# Sunday closest to July 6

Proper 12

Year B

RCL



2 Samuel 11:1-15

Psalm 14

John 6:1-21

## The Collect

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## 2 Samuel 11:1-15

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?" Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my 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 not do such a thing." Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the

evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die.”

**Psalm 14**

***Dixit insipiens***

- 1 The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” \*  
All are corrupt and commit abominable acts;  
there is none who does any good.
- 2 The LORD looks down from heaven upon us all, \*  
to see if there is any who is wise,  
if there is one who seeks after God.
- 3 Every one has proved faithless;  
all alike have turned bad; \*  
there is none who does good; no, not one.
- 4 Have they no knowledge, all those evildoers \*  
who eat up my people like bread  
and do not call upon the LORD?
- 5 See how they tremble with fear, \*  
because God is in the company of the righteous.
- 6 Their aim is to confound the plans of the afflicted, \*  
but the LORD is their refuge.
- 7 Oh, that Israel's deliverance would come out of Zion! \*  
when the LORD restores the fortunes of his people,  
Jacob will rejoice and Israel be glad.

**John 6:1-21**

Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they wanted to

take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

## SERMON

I don't recall which of my elementary teachers first introduced me to the motto, “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely”, but I do recall I was very young and had no idea what she was talking about. We do that with kids all the time – telling them bits of wisdom they don't understand but which we tell them are to be guiding lights for their lives. “Never a borrower or a lender be”, my mother used to say. Wonderful! And you'll never have a home nor own a car.

But I digress. Let's focus on the first one about power's corrupting influence. It came from Lord Acton in 1887: “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”, he said, then added, “Great men are almost always bad men.” I'm glad he added in the “almost” because I'm thinking about Jimmy Carter, who once held great power, but who is still building houses for the poor at the age of 92.

When we say power corrupts, what we're speaking of is the tendency to use secular power which has been entrusted to us (or taken by force) to benefit ourselves. We could scarcely find a better example than the story of David today. David was not just some random nitwit. He was God's anointed, the leader of God's people. One day, he happened to see a woman bathing and he started thinking with the wrong part of his body. Disaster followed as it has done since time out of mind. David's great power corrupted even him. First, he tried to cover up what he had done by encouraging Uriah to sleep with his wife, so that David's culpability in the pregnancy might not become known.

Then David said to Uriah, “Go down to your house, and wash your feet.” Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. When they told David, “Uriah did not go down to his house,” David said to Uriah, “You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?”

To get the full import of David's command requires that you know that in Hebrew,

“feet” does not always mean “feet”. David was ordering Uriah to sleep with his wife. Uriah, who we are told was not of Abraham's children, but a Hittite, flatly refused, and upon righteous grounds.

Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my 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 not do such a thing.”

David tried three times to get Uriah to do what he wanted, even getting Uriah drunk so that his commitment to his principles might be weakened, with no success. In the face of failure, David succumbed to a horrible corruption.

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die.”

This is what we mean by “corruption”. I've told you for twelve years now that you were born into a purpose, a holy purpose. God, who created you for that purpose, will provide for you the power and resources necessary for you to complete your purpose, but such power must not be diverted to anything else. A person has become corrupt when his determination to fulfill his own wishes destroys his performance of that sacred purpose. David sent Uriah's death warrant to Joab by the hand of his victim. It is hard to imagine a more thoroughly corrupt state of mind. David was entrusted with great power that he might use it to lead God's people in God's ways. Instead, he misappropriated his power to serve his own interests.

This, in the law, is called a conflict of interests. In Biblical terms, we might say no man can serve two masters. Comes to the same thing, and that brings me back to Jimmy Carter. I want you to put aside whatever you think about President Jimmy Carter's time in office, and to focus on Jimmy Carter, the man. You may have forgotten that Jimmy's father was a wealthy man but by the terms of his will, his son's inheritance was so small that



future President Carter and his family lived for a time in public housing. He is the only President to have lived in subsidized housing. Even after that, though, he managed to rebuild the farm into a successful business, pulling himself up by his bootstraps, as it were. During their time in public housing, Rosalind studied accounting and Jimmy studied business. It worked. By the time he entered politics, he was wealthy again.

Can you imagine the amount of blood, sweat and tears that went into that journey, to go from subsidized housing to being a successful peanut farmer? Can you not understand, after all that sacrifice, that thoughts might begin to appear in his mind of the ways he could, from his position of power, increase his wealth even while doing good for others? Tariffs on imported peanuts to keep prices high for American peanut farmers or some such? Instead, on January 4, 1977, Carter told reporters that he would free himself from potential conflicts of interest by leaving his peanut business in the hands of trustees.

I think I'd like to modify Lord Acton's saying a bit. I think what he meant to say is, "Secular power corrupts; absolute secular power corrupts absolutely." It is the pursuit of secular goals, that which is good for me, that corrupts. God's power does not corrupt, but the misuse of it can. Our sin, our failing, our corruption is that we are too easily convinced otherwise. The danger flows from our unwillingness to face up to our "shadow self" – that weakness within us that allows us to believe that we are not acting from self-interest, but rather from admirable motives. Jimmy Carter divested himself of his life's work to remove that temptation, turning his back on pursuit of secular success, just as Jesus showed us in our Gospel passage.

When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world." When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

The crowd thought that making Jesus king would assure that for which they wished.

Jesus perceived that the crowd would impose upon him secular power, and be satisfied with that. Jesus knew that was not why He had come.

Well, what is so evil about secular power? If I was king, I'd run things a lot more smoothly than they are running now, that I can tell you! The problem isn't secular power. The problem is that the wrong people, the corrupt ones, are holding the power. All we have to do is to put the power in the hands of the good guys, guys like me, and everything will be well. Vote for me and I'll make everything just the way you like it. That's the siren song we hear every time we turn on the TV and it is contrary to the teachings of Jesus which we just read. Secular power corrupts; absolute secular power corrupts absolutely.

I want to leave you with some words from C.S. Lewis.

**“The most dangerous thing you can do is to take any one impulse of your own nature and set it up as the thing you ought to follow at all costs. There is not one of them which will not make us into devils if we set it up as an absolute guide.”**

We must force ourselves to change our focus from the pursuit of our own goals and desires and focus instead on discovering and following the way of self-denial shown us by the life of Jesus.

AMEN

## BENEDICTION

Jesus walking on the water demonstrated his sovereignty over the physical world, so he COULD have given those who would have imposed secular power upon him those things for which they wished. He did not do so; his purpose is different. His destination led to the cross.

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

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

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It was written anonymously in Greek, for a gentile audience of Greek-speaking Christians. We know that because the author is careful to explain Jewish traditions and translate Aramaic terms for his audience. In the same way we have to do some explaining in order to properly understand Mark.