

Bathsheba's #MeToo Moment

2 Samuel 11:1-15; John 6:1-15

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17,700,000. According to the #MeToo Movement web page, that's how many women and girls have reported a sexual assault in the past ten years. Let me say that number again: 17,700,000. Reported. How many assaults have gone unreported? Double that amount? Triple?

In 2006, women began to bow their backs and say, "No more! It's time perpetrators of sexual violence be held accountable." That year Tarana Burke, a social activist and community organizer, founded the #MeToo Movement to help survivors of sexual violence find healing. Burke says a 13-year-old girl confided in her that she had been sexually abused. Burke says she didn't know what to say. Later she wished she had simply told the girl, "Me too." And a movement was born.

On October 15, 2017, the actress Alyssa Milano sent a tweet encouraging women and girls to tweet their own abuse stories. By the next day, 500,000 women and girls had tweeted about their experiences. The hashtag hit Facebook and was used 12 million times within the first twenty-four hours. Men were called out in entertainment, politics, finance, the military, sports, medicine, and the church.

Then in December of 2017, *Time Magazine* named it Person of the Year: The Silence Breakers, those courageous women who have shared their stories of abuse. The cover pictured Tarana Burke, Ashley Judd, Taylor Swift and others. And to one side of the cover was part of a woman's body, just an arm and shoulder with no face, representing all the women we do not see who are victims of sexual abuse. Suddenly very powerful men began to fall in shame: Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein, beloved TV actor Bill Cosby, Matt Lauer, Charlie Rose, Senator Al Franken, Bill O'Riley, just to name a few.

I tread carefully today, a man speaking about the #MeToo Movement. I sent my sermon to a female colleague, Rev. Tara Bulger, the new pastor at First Presbyterian Church, for her input. I want to speak with sensitivity aware that people in our congregation, women and men, have their own #MeToo story. My hope is that you will find empowerment and healing in Bathsheba's #MeToo moment.

The biblical story of David and Bathsheba is an archetypal story of sexual abuse. Power misused. Arrogance unchecked. And the innocent who become collateral damage. In the end, this classic story reminds us where misused power ends: lives shattered, reputations ruined, and the innocent victimized.

Long ago Abraham Lincoln summed up the life of Israel's King David with these words: "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power."

It was the time of war, we are told, "the spring of the year...when kings go out to battle." King David would normally lead his troops into battle, but not this time. Instead, he sent his nephew and trusted military aide, Joab, to fight the Ammonites. We then read these telling words, "But David remained at Jerusalem."

A king. With complete authority over his subjects. Plenty of time on his hands. And most of the men away at war. He rose from a nap one afternoon and from the roof of the king's palace spied a woman bathing. "The woman was very beautiful," we are told. Rooftop rooms were common in that day. Houses had flat roofs, and rooftop rooms caught the afternoon breeze and were cooler. Since David was king, his roof was likely taller than any others, giving him an open view of all that happened below.

The verbs in this text carry the entire story. He saw. He sent. He took. And he lay with her.

Her name was Bathsheba. Her husband was Uriah, one of the king's most dedicated soldiers, a member of an elite band of fighters called "the thirty" (23:24, 39). In due time, Bathsheba sent word to the king, "I am pregnant."

This was adultery, an egregious sin. It was a violation of the Seventh Commandment: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” It made no exception for the king. And Israel had strict laws concerning adultery, including the death penalty for both parties.

He saw. He sent. He took. And then King David was in a predicament.

In an effort to cover his sin, David sent word to Joab at the battlefield that Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, was to be sent home. Pretending that he wanted an update on the battle, David asked Uriah how Joab and the troops fared. After Uriah’s report, David told him to go home and “wash your feet,” an ancient euphemism for sexual intercourse. Go home, he was telling Uriah, enjoy the comforts of home, spend the time with your wife, and cover my misdeeds.

Like every soldier on that battlefield, though, Uriah had taken a vow of celibacy until the war was over. This was “holy war,” and he had to keep himself focused and pure. Besides how could he go home to the pleasure of his wife when all his comrades in arms fought at the front? As an act of integrity, Uriah refused to go home and slept instead at the door of the king’s house. What a loyal servant!

David was getting desperate. He invited Uriah to the palace again the next day and got him drunk. Go home now, David told the drunken soldier, and enjoy the comforts of home and your wife. But Uriah was no drunken fool. He was a soldier’s soldier and a man of integrity. Listen to his response to the King of Israel:

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.

King David’s sordid actions met an impenetrable wall: a principled man.

His cover-up needed a cover-up, as they often do. He handed his loyal soldier Uriah a letter to deliver back to his commander Joab. It was a letter describing the manner by which Uriah was to be killed. Don't miss the irony. David trusted Uriah to deliver the letter that ordered his death.

David's plan worked, though not perfectly. Uriah was killed, but so were other soldiers, by some accounts eighteen other soldiers.

Joab was afraid to tell the king the news, afraid that his anger over the other soldiers' deaths would send him into a rage. So Joab sent a messenger with a strategically worded message. As expected the king was enraged. He questioned tactics. Why was this done this way? Why did this soldier die? And before the king could take out his rage on the messenger, the messenger ended his report to the king with these strategically placed words, "Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead too."

Oh. I see. Collateral damage. To cover up a selfish whim. Because he could. Because he had the power to do it. Power misused. Arrogance unchecked. Lincoln was right. If you want to test a man's character, give him power.

This dramatic chapter ends with these very important words, "The thing that David had done displeased the Lord."

Those words set the stage for the fall of a great king. Yes, he was powerful, a mighty and successful warrior, but he finally met his greatest enemy—his own dark side. He became the enemy he could not defeat.

Bathsheba's #MeToo Moment came when a prophet named Nathan confronted King David. "You are the man," Nathan charged. There is our model, Rev. Bulger told me. Nathan. We must be Nathans, calling out abuse wherever we see it.

We are told that the sword never left David's house.

17,700,000. Maybe double that. Maybe triple. Women and girls, we believe you. We join you in saying, "No more! It is time perpetrators

of sexual violence be held accountable.” It’s also time for all of us to be Nathans, calling out abuse when we see it, and working for a climate of mutual respect, where boundaries are honored, human dignity is valued, and everyone is safe.

Closing Prayer

Lord, we pray for a better day, where everyone is respected. Until that day comes bring healing and empowerment to our most vulnerable. Amen.