

Action & Intention

2 Samuel 11:1-15

Rob Andrews

In today's Old Testament reading two themes caught my attention. The first being the intent behind David's actions. The second being the specifics of his actions

Canadian social activist and researcher Allan Wade reminds us that we speak in general, but live in specifics.

Ask a child "How was school today" and the response with which I am familiar is "OK". Ask a specific question, "What was the best thing about school today?" and I have heard of sports day, playing with my friends, music and when the final bell rang.

So, let's look more specifically at King David's misdemeanours in today's reading.

Firstly:

The expectation of the King of Israel is that if the nation is at war, he will be at the battle field. David was not. He was in Jerusalem on "vacation" as described by one commentator.

Secondly:

Kings in those times could do anything. However, David was different. He was king of Israel and was subject to the Torah but he overlooks this.

David as King had numerous wives and this was accepted. Then he sees a beautiful woman and desires her. The catch is that she is married and **he knows it**. He ignores his allegiance to the Torah. "He sent, he took and he lay"

One commentator suggests Bathsheba may have been trying to attract his attention. But that is irrelevant. Irrespective of what Bathsheba did, David was responsible for his actions.

Thirdly:

Bathsheba informs David she is pregnant. David has a problem. How does he solve it?

First attempt:

David recalls Uriah a Hittite from the front and feigns interest in what is happening at the front. Currying favour with a Hittite, a member of a group who are looked down upon by the Israelites. He greets him with "Shalom" – meaning hullo/peace.

He suggests Uriah go home to his wife with instructions to "wash your feet" meaning have sex with your wife. If he does so David can excuse himself from

responsibility for Bathsheba's pregnancy. The strategy does not work. Uriah remains faithful to the troops who are still at the front.

Second

His next duplicitous strategy is to invite Uriah to dine and drink with him. A bit like a modern day field marshal inviting a private to come over for a BBQ and a few beers. The writer of the passage makes it clear that David "made Uriah drunk" but avoided drunkenness himself. Surely, if he is drunk Uriah will go home and "wash his feet". But again, Uriah remains loyal to his fellow soldiers and does not go home.

Third

David's final act is to send Uriah back to the front with a letter containing his own death sentence. Joab is to send Uriah to the front "*and then withdraw from him*" where surely he will be killed. Then when it becomes obvious that Bathsheba is pregnant it can be assumed Uriah had "washed his feet" with Bathsheba.

David's plan worked. Uriah was killed.

The commentators on today's passage do not spare David. They use words such as: abuse of power; betrayal; duplicitous; slimy; unfaithful; crass; shamelessly and cynical

And they point out how David's behaviour is juxtaposed with Uriah's - loyalty, integrity and dignity

David did it all because
He wanted to
He could
And he thought he would get away with it

So what might I take from this?
When have I acted with intent in such a way that another person is harmed
Because I wanted to
I could
And I thought I would get away with it

And further
When have I failed to act in such a way that another person benefitted
Because I wanted to
I could
And I thought I would get away with it

And to remind myself, that I actually "don't get away with it!" because God knows what is in my heart.

Prayer of Confession

Now I invite you into a world of reality and imagination.

While God does not keep a score, it can be helpful for us to reflect on a scale from 1 with increasing severity up to 10, where human actions do not match God's standards

Now as you reflect on David's actions what is his score on his actions towards Bathsheba?

What is his score on his machinations with Uriah to cover over his misdemeanour?

Now in our own hearts let's take a few moments to give our own scores to action that does not meet God's standards

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

God, we offer you our scores where we did not meet your standards, knowing that you are a forgiving God and that we can go from this place cleansed of our sins in order to start again

Thanks be to God.