
The Loving Gardener

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 28 July 2024

2 Samuel 11:1-15 • Ephesians 3:14-21 • Matthew 13:24-30,36-43



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

We talked last week about King David and his journey to the throne. It was a long and a difficult journey, but he always had God's blessing along the way. And when he arrived and had settled the lands and peoples around him, and achieved peace, God made an extraordinary commitment to him. God would always love him and never reject him, no matter what he did. God would punish him, if needed, but never reject him.

Well, it seems like only a little time passes before one of those opportunities for punishment comes up. David lets his lust run away with him, his lust and his natural appetite for power. He forgets his own humble beginnings and begins to

think that he can do anything, and have anything, he wants. And what he wants in today's Old Testament reading is another man's wife, the beautiful Bathsheba, whom he sees from the rooftop bathing in her house. As king, he simply orders her to come to him, and she becomes pregnant. And she is the wife of one of David's soldiers, Uriah.

Now David is desperate to hide his sin, and tries to get Uriah to go home and make love to Bathsheba so the child will be thought to be Uriah's. But Uriah is too conscientious to rest and relax with his wife while his brother soldiers are still in the field. So David resolves to do a wicked, shameful thing, and arranges to have Uriah killed in battle so that he, David, may fully possess Bathsheba.

Where is God in this? God had chosen David to be his anointed king, and promised that he would never desert David. But he will punish him, and we see that punishment in a later passage of 2 Samuel: the child born to Bathsheba becomes ill and dies. David knows this is God's punishment, and he feels it. Yet God keeps the promise, and does not disown David or remove him from the throne. On the contrary: Bathsheba becomes the mother of Solomon, destined to be the greatest of all merely human kings. God uses David's sin to further God's own purposes. Solomon, as great as he becomes, still sins against God, but that is a story for another time.

God's promise to David means that God continues to be interested in David as his life continues. God treats David the way a gardener treats a favoured tree, pruning away the unwanted growth, the faults and the sins, and feeding the good growth. This is a common sort of image in the Bible, and we see it again in today's Gospel, as Jesus tells the disciples the parable of the wheat and the tares, or weeds. Tares are weeds which closely resemble wheat as they grow, and you can't tell the two plants apart until they mature. In the parable, the harvesters separate the two, throwing the weeds into the fire and storing up the wheat in the barn. It is one of Jesus's clearer parables, easy to understand. Jesus really doesn't need to explain this one, but he does. Those who sin will be gathered up at the end of the age like weeds, and thrown out, away from the saints in heaven.

This parable could also be applied to an individual person. As I suggested above, God may root out sin from our lives, and if we walk with God, we will turn away from our sinful life. The sins will be removed like the weeds, and leave us pure and acceptable to God. Really, this is the process of growing up, isn't it? We learn over our childhoods what is good behaviour and what is bad, how to be kind rather than cruel, to think of others rather than live selfishly.

I of course was a model child — but if my parents were here, they would tell you of a few times when I didn't live up to their expectations, when my

behaviour was far from perfect. The times when I yelled at my sister and chased her around the house, then kicked a hole in her bedroom door, which she had slammed in my face — the times when I thought I knew everything and spoke rudely to my grandparents — there were, I'm sure, many times like these. But over time, faults are corrected, manners are improved, some glimmerings of wisdom begin to appear. I'm sure Jesus works through parents to prune us, to correct us, to feed us, water and fertilise us, so that over time we change from little savage children of humankind to blessed, faithful children of God.

I sometimes ask myself: why does God put up with us? Why does God create imperfect beings and then try to mould them into useful adults? Many of you here have raised children to maturity. I'm sure it was difficult, tiring and trying at times. But I expect most of you wouldn't have missed it. Well, you're all created in God's image. God too takes pleasure in his children. God created us in order to love us and care for us.

God's promise to and relationship with David shows us how God cares for us. It also teaches us humility. It makes no difference to God if you are a king or just an ordinary man, high and mighty or lowly and obscure. We are all down here on earth and God is far up above us — yet also close enough to us to guide us and teach us and direct us. Thanks be to God for his love, nurturing us and bringing us along with Jesus and the Spirit to share the promised kingdom. Amen.