

Pentecost 10  
08/09/09

2 Samuel 11:1-17  
Pastor David M. Kuehl

St. Paul's, Muskego, WI  
232, 385 (1,2), 303, 304, 389

Did you know that you can climb too high for your own good? That it's possible to ascend too far, stand too tall, elevate too much?

In his book, *Facing Your Giants*, Max Lucado writes that, if you linger too long at high altitudes, two of your senses suffer. In the first place, your hearing dulls. It's hard to hear people when you're higher up than they are. And when you're up there, your eyesight dims. It's hard to focus on people when you're so far above them. They appear so small and all tend to look alike.

You don't hear them, and you don't see them. You are above them. Which is exactly where David is in our text today. As we continue our August series of sermons, *No Perfect People Allowed*, we note that no one is perfect. If God were to deal with us based on what we deserve, none of us would stand. For like David, to one degree or another, we all like to stand on:

### **The Deadly Pinnacle of Pride**

- 1. Distorted perceptions**
- 2. Devious practices**
- 3. Due punishment**
- 4. Divine pardon**

1. David is at an all-time high. His success crests when he is in his late forties. Israel is expanding. The country is prospering. In two decades on the throne, David has distinguished himself as a warrior, a musician, a statesman, and a king. His cabinet is strong, and the boundaries of his empire stretch for 60,000 square miles. There are no defeats on the battlefield and no blemishes on his administration. He is loved by the people, served by the soldiers, and adored by the crowds. Even God calls David *"a man after his own heart"* (1 Sm 13:14).

For sure, David has never been higher, but he has never been more vulnerable. He stands at the highest point of his life, in the highest position in the kingdom, at the highest place in the city—on his balcony overlooking Jerusalem—but he isn't where he should be. He should be with his men—at battle, astride his steed and against his foe. But he isn't. He's at home. Our text reads, *"In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem."*

It's springtime in Israel. The nights are warm, and the air is sweet. Why David isn't with his men, on the battlefield, engaged in war, we don't know. But we do know that he has time on his hands, love on his mind, and people at his disposal. And we know that *"idle hands are used in the devil's workshop."*

2. His eyes fall on a woman as she bathes, and he likes what he sees. So he asks about her. A servant returns and gives him this information: *"Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"* Did you note that the servant wisely laces his information with warning? He gives not only Bathsheba's name but also her marital status and the name of her husband. Why tell David she is married if not to caution him? And why tell him her husband's name unless David is familiar with it? But David misses the hint and takes the first step down the slippery slope of sin. Our text says, *"Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her."*

It's interesting to note how many times David "sends" in this account. He *"sends"* Joab to battle. He *"sends"* the servant to find out about Bathsheba and then for her to come to him. When David learns that she's pregnant, he *"sends"* word to Joab to *"send"* Uriah back to Jerusalem. David *"sends"* Uriah to Bathsheba to rest, but he's too noble. David then *"sends"* Uriah back to a place on the battlefield where he most certainly will be killed. Finally, thinking the cover-up is complete, David *"sends"* for Bathsheba and marries her (v. 27).

We don't like this sending, devious David, do we? We prefer the pasturing David, caring for the flock; the brave David, standing up to Goliath; the worshiping David, penning the psalms. We don't like the David who has lost control of his self-control, who sins as he sends. What's happened to him?

Short answer? Altitude sickness. David's been too high for too long. The thin air has messed with his senses and puffed up his pride. He can't hear as he used to hear. He can't hear the warnings of his servant or the voice of his conscience or even the Word of his God. And his lofty position has blinded his eyes. Does he see Bathsheba, the person? No, he sees Bathsheba's body and Bathsheba's curves. He sees Bathsheba, the conquest. But he doesn't see Bathsheba, the human being, the wife of Uriah, the daughter of Israel, the child of God.

Can we fall into the same trap? Is David's balcony a place where we can find ourselves standing? I believe we can.

I wasn't on a balcony, but I was on a basketball court. And I didn't watch a woman bathe, but I did watch a fellow referee fumble. She couldn't do anything right. A foul right in front of her, and she passed on it. A ticky-tack traveling violation, and she was all over it. Her mechanics were sloppy, her positioning bad, and her judgment questionable.

And I started to resent the fact that I was working with her. I suppose I was feeling a bit smug. I'd been assigned to work my first State Tournament game a few months before. Fellow officials were envious of me, friends congratulated me, and many of you folks watched me on TV. So I started summer ball feeling somewhat cocky. I had to tilt my head when I walked into the gym. I walked on the court knowing that the game was in good hands, since heaven knows, I'm essential to a well-officiated game. Then the game started, and I soon found myself regretting taking the assignment.

Don't look at me like that. Who of you hasn't done the same, felt superior to someone, I mean? The parking lot attendant, the grocery store bagger, the beer vendor at the ballgame, the clerk at MacDonald's. You've done what I did. And we've all done what David did. We've lost our sight and our hearing because we've become puffed up with pride.

The account of David and Bathsheba is more about power and pride than it is about lust and passion. It's about a man who rose too high for his own good, a man who failed to heed these words of God: *"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall"* (Pr 16:18). There's a reason why God hates arrogance. He hates to see his children sin. He hates to see his Davids seduce and his Bathshebas victimized. God hates what pride does to us. He doesn't just dislike it; he hates it. He couldn't state it any more clearly than he does when he says, *"I hate pride and arrogance"* (Pr 8:13)? And again, *"The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished"* (Pr 16:5).

3. You don't want God to do that. Just ask David. David never quite recovers from this incident in his life. His family personifies the word "dysfunctional." The death of a child, rebellion, incest, murder—all of these are part of the king's family life. Don't make his mistake. It's far wiser to come down the mountain than to fall from it.

But when you do (and you will), don't forget that this story doesn't end here. Read about it in 2 Samuel, chapter 12. For more than a year, David lives in his sin, refusing to confess his wrong and repent. Not surprisingly, he suffers from sleepless nights and aching bones. He writes about it in Psalm 32. *"When I kept*

*silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer"* (3,4). While not yet repentant, David is physically tired, emotionally drained, and spiritually dry; his heart is primed for God to take action.

Which is exactly what God does. He sends the Prophet Nathan to confront David. His approach is to tell a touching story of a poor man who has but one lamb that he treats like a pet, and a rich neighbor who arrogantly takes that lamb, slaughters it, and serves it to his guests. David is on the edge of his chair as he listens to this heart-rending story. He who has been a shepherd understands how the poor man feels. In anger he orders that the heartless rich neighbor be sentenced to die.

Nathan brings the story home when he says to David, *"You are the man!"* (2 Sm 12:7). How David must blush at this moment! How can he miss the point of the story? He no longer proudly hides the past but openly and humbly confesses, *"I have sinned against the Lord"* (2 Sm 12:13). How important it is for us to note that God waits for us to confess and acknowledge our sins in the same way. *"If we confess our sins,"* his Word tells us, *"[God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"* (1Jn 1:9).

4. And it's just as important for us to see what Nathan does when David confesses his sin. No acts of penance prescribed, no Hail Marys or Our Fathers to say on a rosary. Just words of absolution: *"The Lord has taken away your sin"* (2 Sm 12:13). What a relief! Like a cool, refreshing shower on a hot, humid day, God mercifully washes away his sin and silences his tormenting conscience. Having spoken that word of absolution, Nathan's assignment is complete. He doesn't need to say anything more.

What a relief for us, too! *"The blood of Jesus, [God's] Son, purifies us from all sin"* (1 Jn 1:8). And so, to each of you, regardless of the magnitude or frequency of your wrongdoing, regardless of what you have done or left undone as you stood on the balcony of your pride, I say, "The Lord has taken away your sin. Rejoice and be glad and go and sin no more." Amen.