

Sermon for 8-2-09  
2 Samuel 11:1-15 with

Katie and I were going into Pittsburgh for our anniversary. We wanted to go on one of the Inclines before going out to eat. We got directions off the internet, not from the inclines' website. I had a feeling we were going the wrong way. I had even been on the incline years before, but in my pride did not want to admit we made a mistake. We followed our directions to the Allegheny Cemetery. There I compounded the mistake by driving around and around trying to find an incline where it just couldn't be.

We have heard about how our desire for control leads us away from God even as we seek to honor him. As we put ourselves in God's place (we try to build God up) and we take for granted how he is building us up. Jeremiah 2:13 says, "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me (the fountain of living water) and dug out cisterns for themselves (cracked cisterns that hold no water.)" God provides us with water to drink (in a fountain coming up from the ground. We walk away from that source of water. Our tendency is to dig a hole to try to store the water God has given us so we are in control. That effort is flawed. When the water leaks out of the hole, we are thirsty. (Like throwing out a meal you don't want, then going to make the grilled cheese you want and burning it, making it uneatable.)

We want to be the authority that directs our life, when God is the authority that gives us life. Commonly we don't just turn away from God who can direct us, sustain us, help us, we go out and make things worse.

This is clearly demonstrated in King David's life in 2 Samuel 11. There is a change from the shepherd boy who relied on God to defeat Goliath. There is a change from the king who tried to honor God and wanted to put God's interests first. There is a shift in David's story from hero to villain, from power to misuse of power, from living for God to sinning, from receiving blessing from God to taking from others.

Before David led the people in battle. That spring he did not go out to fight. God had agreed to give his people a king because they requested someone to lead them in battle. The people went out. David chose to remain. He was in control. He could do whatever he wanted. This was the beginning of David's actions of unfaithfulness towards his people which would have lasting consequences.

When we are not taking part in the mission God has called us to, our focus shifts to ourselves. We take over control from God. What are the consequences of our 'staying at home?' As we will see with David, self-

focus inevitably hurts someone and our trying to remain in control injures others (even family, the church).

For David, "It happened". Not being focused on God's mission led to self-focus. He was at home, laying around sleeping, probably bored. He saw a beautiful woman. He found out who she was. He learned she was married. David did what he wanted. He called her to the palace. She came. David was in control. The next thing we know she is pregnant.

Things spun out of David's control. David has acted apart from God. He thought he could do what he wanted. Yet he couldn't control the pregnancy. David wouldn't admit his mistake. David still didn't account for God. He continued to try to be in control. He compounded his sin and his mistake. David's sin and his unfaithfulness to his people became clearer as he tried to orchestrate a cover-up.

With his authority he called the woman's husband, who was faithfully fighting for him, back to Jerusalem. David would exert his control and the husband Uriah would go home and spend the night with his wife and everything would be taken care of. He even sent a present as an incentive. But Uriah didn't do what David wanted. He didn't go to his own home to sleep.

David tried to see if he could talk Uriah into doing what he wanted. David asked why Uriah did not sleep in his own house. In reply Uriah unknowingly revealed the depth of David's sins. He said, God's presence, all the people, the army are camping in the open field. Who am I to go to my house, to lie with my wife? I would never do that because I am faithful to you David. David wasn't done trying to cover up his sin. He got Uriah drunk so that he would go back to his own house. That didn't work either. David could not control Uriah's principles.

We see (and David could see) his unfaithfulness to God and to his people by not being with them in their mission. We see how he has made things worse by being unfaithful to his faithful servant. He has made things worse again by trying to cover up his sin by bribery and trickery.

Finally David unambiguously put himself in the place of God. He ordered Uriah's death. To make matter worse yet again to make it look natural, to cover up Uriah's death meant sending other men to die in an ill-fated attack.

David did not want to face the reality of his sin. He was unaware of how he had turned from God and was making his own faulty rules for reality. He trusted his own authority. He continued to try to be in control. We may be tempted to excuse David's sin. Everybody makes mistakes. If Uriah had just gone to his house there would be no more problem. This

shows the ease with which we excuse and cover up our own sin (how we have turned from God and are making our own rules for reality.)

Let's look again at Jeremiah's harsh words for Israel. God's people have changed from the Lord who brought them out of slavery and led them out of darkness into a place of plenty. They have gone after worthless things and become worthless things themselves. Be appalled at this.

I believe these words challenge us too. Are we aware of our sin? Do we see the ways we follow authorities other than God? Do we see the ways we excuse our sin and try to take the place of God? How are we being unfaithful in not supporting the mission God has called us to do together? When we lose sight of God's mission, when God is not in control in our lives, we go after worthless things and become worthless things. We are of no use to God.

God doesn't leave us in sin. In Communion we remember and experience anew how God is for us. God sends his son Jesus to remind us that he is God who forgives us, who leads us into new life. Francois Fenelon archbishop of Cambria in words that resonate centuries later writes, "Happy are they who give themselves to God! We are delivered from a countless mass of evils, because placing our will entirely in the hands of God, we want only what God wants...." In Communion we give God control of our lives for the first time or again. We acknowledge Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are what give us worth and lead us forward in life. In Communion we are joined together in the mission of God to this world. As David himself writes in Psalm 34:8 "Taste and see that the LORD is good."