

Hillcrest Congregational UCC  
Rev. Dr. Loletta M. Barrett  
Abundance  
7-26-09  
3:14-21 Ephesians, John 6:1-21, 2 Samuel 11:1-15

This week I confess that took the chicken way out. I looked at the Greek Testament reading John 6:1-21, and it seemed to be the same story we looked at in Mark last week. It is the story of Jesus creating an abundance of food to feed the 5,000, and then walking on water in a storm to the disciples. I thought, “hmm- I feel like we may have mined all the treasure here already, I’ll go to the Hebrew Testament text.”

So I went to the 2 Samuel 11:1-1 reading. But then I realized I had moved the reading of the scripture forward in our service of worship, so that the children and youth could be present to hear it. And, in this text, King David commits adultery with Bathsheba, gets her pregnant, and when her husband Uriah refuses to go and sleep with her so that David can pass off Bathsheba’s child as his, David arranges for Uriah to be moved to the front line of battle, and “accidentally” killed in the fighting.

Now, I may be brave enough to preach on the salacious soap opera story of Salome seducing Herod to get John’s head on a platter to adults, but this text was just a little too challenging for me with our younger generations. I mean here David, the chosen of God, the ancestor of Jesus, is caught in a story in which there is no excuse for his behavior. It is as low as you can possibly get.

First, he witnesses Bathsheba in a very private moment, a woman’s purification ritual. Then he sends his messengers to get her. She has no say in the matter, no control over her own body or person. She has done nothing to deserve the treatment she receives and

He is the King- to refuse him could mean death. This is not a consensual affair. Then, he breaks not only the commandment against coveting, and not only the commandment against adultery, and not only the commandment against murder, he does just the lowest, meanest, rottenest, nastiest thing to do in ANY book I ever read!

After forcing himself on Bathsheba, David tries to trick Uriah into having sex with her so Uriah will think it is his child. But Uriah refuses- and his reasons are righteous and should shame David. Uriah came from battle where he was separated from his wife and home, while David luxuriates in the palace! Then Uriah tells David that it would not be right for him to go and enjoy time with his wife in his home when, “The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field [at war].” Uriah shows loyalty to the King, the people, God, and the General, and then David orders the General to make sure this guy gets killed! Geez this guy David has... nerve.

So after I eliminated the Gospel reading, and there was no way I wanted to have the Hebrew testament read and have to try to explain it to the children and youth, I had to look at our Epistle reading, the letter of Paul to the Christian church in Ephesus. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians who are Gentiles is very affirming and encouraging. He tells them his purpose is to confirm to them that the message that Jesus brought of God’s love, forgiveness and grace, God’s wish for relationship with the people, is as much for them as it is for their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters. This is the reason he bows before God- the reason he has submitted himself to the service of the Gospel. This Good News is the reason for his ministry, indeed even for his life.

Here in his letter Paul is praying over and uplifting the Ephesians and us, and asking God to send God’s blessings of strength, faith, and love. He starts, Ephesians 3:16, “I pray that you will be strengthened through God’s spirit, and that Christ may dwell in

your hearts through faith, and that you will be rooted and grounded in love. Then Paul asks God for the power to comprehend, the breadth and length and height and depth of God's love that Jesus the Christ has revealed, a love that surpasses knowledge. Paul says that understanding this love will fill us with the FULLNESS OF GOD.

Paul closes his prayer with praise and thanksgiving to God. To God be the Glory forever, because God's power working within us is so great it is able to accomplish far more than all we can ask or imagine- an abundance. This is a powerful prayer and witness as to what Paul believes God offers us in relationship. Yet, sometimes abundance doesn't seem to be enough, and I think that was what was happening with King David. You see, David had abundance- everything he could ever have wanted. He rose from the youngest, smallest, most insignificant son of a relatively obscure father, to king!

His story started when Samuel went looking for someone to anoint King of Israel after God had gotten tired of the first King, Saul going off on his own. David has to be called in from herding sheep. All his bigger, older, more significant looking and seeming brothers are passed by and David is anointed. He is given the Kingdom, armies, wealth beyond measure, wives, children, respect of the people, and the ark of the covenant. He is God's favored and chosen one. He lives in an abundance far more than he could have asked for or imagined. Yet he, literally, lusts for more, breaks all the commandments and Uriah's and God's hearts. He is King and has it abundance, but it is not enough.

We contrast this with the vision of Jesus in the Gospel according to John today. Just like we saw in the Gospel according to Mark, the author uses the miracle stories to point out the contrast between the people who understand who Jesus is, and the disciples who miss it. But the difference, the significant verse here, comes at verse 15: "When Jesus realized that they were about to come and

take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.” According to the prophecy, the messiah, the King of the Jews would be a descendent of David. Jesus is a descendent of David, but he is cut from an entirely different bolt of cloth.

David is anointed king, Jesus withdraws so they cannot anoint him. David had a palace, Jesus has no home, no place to lay his head. David had wealth, Jesus is an itinerant preacher. David is surrounded by courtiers, Jesus is surrounded by fishermen. David had armies, Jesus tells his disciples not only to not to take a sword with them, but he forbids them to take up arms to defend him, and warns them that those who live by the sword will die by the sword. David dances and acts as priest in the temple, Jesus is rejected by the temple leadership and condemns their hypocrisy. David had wives, children, and family, Jesus rejects his kin. He shows that he will not be beholden to the kinship requirements of the day, and states unequivocally that all people who follow the Way are his mother, brother and sister.

David takes and surrounds himself with beautiful women, music, and things. Jesus takes nothing, gives everything, and invites and welcomes the unclean who seek God and wholeness. David takes the life of another man to cover up his sin. Jesus gives his life to free all people from aimlessness and sin.

David has everything he thinks he ever wanted. David has everything we might think we would ever want, but David wants more and goes after it. Jesus has nothing, none of the things we think we have to have, and yet, Jesus wants nothing more. Jesus wants and needs nothing more because he has the fullness of God.

The fullness of God. With the fullness of God comes God’s strength, faith and perfect love. We see this in everything that Jesus is and does in his life, ministry, death and resurrection. Jesus comprehended.

Jesus lived within the breadth and length and height and depth of God's love, the love that surpasses knowledge. Because of that, God's power worked within him so greatly that he was able to accomplish far more than the people around him asked or imagined- an abundance. Jesus lived the abundant life and invited us to do so as well. Through out his ministry, he called people away from what they thought they wanted and needed, to an alternative vision of reality and life in God, from the way of death and destruction, to the way of life. In John 10:10 he said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

I spent the last week engaged in study and prayer about our interim time together. I have been inspired to ask all of us to do the same. In your prayers, consider your own lives, consider your part in this gathering of God's people, consider the ministry that we together are called to serve. You and I are being called away from what we think we want and need. We are being called to deepen our relationship with God, to seek and immerse ourselves in God's alternative vision of reality and life. Let us pray together for the Spirit's gift of comprehension of God's love that surpasses all understanding. It is in the fullness of God, in the power of God working within us, that we will accomplish far more than all we can ask or imagine- abundance in our lives, our church and our community.

By the way, I don't promise that it will be easy, or comfortable. But true abundance is worth it. Amen.