

A Parable
By Rev Todd Farnsworth
2 Samuel 12: 1-9



The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. 2 The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, 3 but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. 4 “Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.” 5 David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! 6 He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.” 7 Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. 9 Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

The prophet Nathan had to choose his words very carefully. He was coming to condemn the king, King David! And that was not something one did lightly. After all, King David had just set up one of his own men to be killed in an ambush. He had sacrificed one of his own so that he could be with the man's wife. He had put Israel in jeopardy because of his need for power over a woman who was married to someone else. He had used that power to rape the woman and take her as HIS wife.

So Nathan, being a wise prophet of the Lord, allows David to condemn himself. Nathan tells a story that parallels the behavior of the king and the king is outraged. How dare someone with so much take advantage of one with so little? *David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! 6 He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."*

Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

God had given David the world. Every material thing he could need; all the power and status he could imagine. It was not enough for David and he took from someone with less status without pity...without compassion...without humility.

And that's the parable. That's the lesson in a nutshell. Pretty straightforward. I'm not going to try and compare us with David because we haven't committed murder or knowingly used our power to take control of someone.

What I'd like to talk to you about is where we are today as a church.

Before I came here 5 years ago, BCC was a church with a great reputation in the community, filled with folks who held good positions in their fields, folks who believed in the mission of BCC and put their talents to work toward providing services to the Village and beyond. BCC was a well ordered and governed church. The boards and committees followed schedules of activities and like a machine that has been cared for, it roared with confidence and a sense of place. The ministers before me witnessed you build Beebe Hall, and grow the Sunday school to over 100 children. They preached to a room bursting with parishioners each and every Sunday. I imagine they were proud of you, as I am proud of you. There is a lot to celebrate in the power and possibility of this church.

In fact, the one *new* lesson I have tried to impart to you over the past five years is the one that David came by in today's lesson...humility.

Humility. The word gets a bad wrap in circles like ours. It connotes timidity. It connotes weakness. It connotes shame. None of the above relates to members of our church! We are strong and brave and anyone who disagrees must not have been here over the past 1000 days. Like David, we had received much and we wielded it like Kings and Queens. We kept our staff employed during the pandemic. We kept our programs running. We checked in on one another. We expanded our ministries, our territory, if you will. We strode through this time with a serious assurance that we could make things be how we wanted them to be because we had always had that power in the past. We took the situations thrown at us seriously. We took ourselves seriously. It has been a serious time...which is why this year's Stewardship Theme may strike you as profane.

The theme of our pledge drive this year is foolishness. It is about being fools for Christ. It is about embracing the holy absurdity of making a commitment to a body of faith that is dwindling in numbers, that has very few children left, whose leaders are exhausted and stretched wafer thin, and that is out of our control. Making a pledge as “fools for Christ” is about believing that God is bigger and has a plan even when all evidence points against it.

Like “humility” the word “foolishness” has a lousy reputation...but they are from the same coin. In order to be humble before God, I believe we need to confess our foolishness. We need to act on our foolishness. Risk being silly and nonsensical before the world because we have faith that our Lord can make something out of it...out of us! Foolishness before God is a spiritual practice that requires us to be vulnerable with each other and with God. the crowns we wear don't mean much in the realm of foolishness. We become servants to one another. We answer to a higher calling than our own needs. Being humble means that we acknowledge that God has more control than we do...and that we believe that somehow in the midst of this lemon of a time, God will create a tall, cool, glass of lemonade.

Now, I know that you can do this. Before the pandemic, if I mentioned my love of the Red Sox or the New England Patriots, you were relaxed and humble enough, even in the midst of worship, to boooooo me with abandon. You groaned at the terrible jokes I told. You learned about the Book of Joy and how to cook foods as Jesus ate. You embraced home hair cut tutorials with Jill Benzenberg, and online BINGO parties. Some of you even learned that your voices were not quite on key as you thought they were when you recorded them for our virtual choir! You laughed, we

laughed at how awful things were and we cried when they got even worse. We were on our way to humble. We were *humble-ish* before God. And with humble came compassion. We cared for each other. We cared beyond ourselves. With compassion came joy. Our clenched jaws relaxed a little. With joy came peace and the assurance that God was still watching out for us in love.

When we returned to one another's presence, it seemed to me that we had forgotten some of those gifts of the spirit. It still seems that way.

With humble came compassion. With compassion came joy. With joy came peace and the assurance that God was still watching out for us in love.

I want you to remember that love. I need you to remember that, *out of our control*, hope. I want you to remember it for yourselves, but I also want you to remember it for me. True confession, I need your out-of-control hope, because I know that I can't do this alone. I am weary from the past two years (when I was physically here mostly by myself) and I need you to act on all of those lessons of humility that I have tried to bestow upon you. I need you to act on those lessons so that we can move together into whatever future God holds for us. If either of us resists or insists on doing it our way, we will put obstacles before our Beloved's plans and promptings. It won't stop God, but it will make our wilderness time prolonged and more painful. We've all been through a lot of pain already. We don't want to cause any more than the pandemic has already wrought.

In the Bible Study about Habakkuk, we are learning about the power of waiting on the Lord during difficult seasons. Active waiting includes watching for glimmers of God's glory seeping through the chaos we are experiencing. Even that kind of waiting requires humility or foolishness. It requires a commitment to the knowledge that we are not God...and that's ok. Instead, we are fools who can encourage one another in our belief in God. We are fools who can speak a preposterous word of hope to one another in the storm. We are fools who can act with compassion toward another fool who is, like us, doing the best they can to muddle through this dizzying time in our history. We are fools who can roll our eyes and laugh together at the improbable faith that draws us in to see what God will do next.

God had given David the world. Every material thing he could need; all the power and status he could imagine. It was not enough for David and he took from someone with less status without pity...without compassion...without humility.

Like King David, we have been given the world. The spiritual thing he lacked was pity, humility, an ability to see that he was not really in control after all. Let us take up that gift we've been given. Let's be fools together before our Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.