

July 29, 2018

II Samuel 11: 1-15

Prayer: O Lord, we ask your blessing on the words spoken here today. Make the speaking of your Word and the understanding of your Word what you want it to be. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Consequences

Many of you know our younger daughter, Madison. She's 28, and is working in San Diego with a group called Global Leadership Adventures.

She oversees six summer camps for American students in the Dominican Republic. This summer, she went down to the island for two weeks to set things up, then returned to San Diego.

She called us this week to say she had just realized that part of her job is taking the distraught phone calls from campers and parents.

Sort of the international version of Camp Granada. "Hello, Muddah, Hello, Faddah."

One girl arrived in the Dominican Republic and texted her mother, "Help me. I'm dying." Then turned off her phone.

So Madison arranged a three-way phone call among herself, a counselor and the frantic mother. She said, "Ma'am, we've got eyes on your daughter right now, and she's splashing in the pool. I'm pretty sure she's not dying."

Another student got to the island and started calling her mother every 30 minutes.

Madison was on the phone with the mom, and she said, “Madison, you’re going to think I’m terrible, but I’ve stopped taking her calls.”

Madison said, “Oh, that’s exactly what my mom would do.”

That mom and I come from the same school of parenting – which is, the point of the whole thing is to raise independent adults. We are the anti-helicopter parents.

Vince and I used to tell Taylor: “Do not get thrown into an international prison. We can’t take time off work to get you out.”

The bottom line is, When someone removes the sting of consequences, we learn nothing. That’s the premise of parenting. That’s the premise of one of our textbooks here, *Toxic Charity*.

For while we do not have control over all the consequences that come our way, we do have control over many of them.

A lack of education is probably going to lead to a poor paying job.

Smoking may well lead to lung cancer or heart disease.

Lack of money management will lead to financial insecurity.

Meth use will lead to skin sores, infections, tooth loss and a gradual shriveling of the entire body.

That is a big part of what our social workers do – try to help someone understand the the consequences of their actions – past, present and future. Because you would be surprised

by how many people think things happen to them out of the blue, when in reality they are the natural consequences of their actions.

When I first came to Triune, we spent a great deal of time replacing clothes and blankets and toiletries for people who had things stolen or thrown away. But after awhile, we realized that was a natural consequence of living on the street. If you lived on the street, your things were going to be stolen or thrown away.

Our constant replacement of things wasn't solving the problem at all. Getting someone to a point of sobriety and employment and housing solved the problem.

When we cannot or do not look ahead to consequences, we act in ways that are detrimental to us and everyone around us.

In today's Scripture, we are going to look at a story that set consequences in motion that would reverberate for generations. It comes from that most-action-packed book of the Old Testament – Samuel. And it is the turning point in the life of King David, the point where he stops seeking the will of the Lord and starts seeking to fulfill his own desires.

And there are consequences. Boy, are there consequences.

As we said a few weeks ago, God's original intent was for God alone to be the king of Israel. But there came a time when the people wanted a king like their neighbors had.

Samuel warned them against it. But the people replied, **“No! We are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.”** (I Sam. 8: 19-20)

These two reasons the people wanted a king are telling. One – they wanted to be like the nations around them, whom they mostly hated. And two – they wanted a king to go out in front and fight their battles.

So the Lord gave them King Saul, who was a mighty soldier who went out front and fought Israel's battles. But then Saul displeased the Lord, and the Lord chose David to be Israel's second king.

At the point of today's story, King David has victoriously led Israel in battle for many years. He is the epitome of the king the people wanted. But all that is about to change.

Let's begin reading **II Samuel 11: 1-17**.

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

² It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. ³ David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, 'This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.'

⁴ So David sent messengers to fetch her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. ⁵ The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, 'I am pregnant.'

⁶ So David sent word to Joab, 'Send me Uriah the Hittite.' And Joab sent Uriah to David.

⁷When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. ⁸Then David said to Uriah, 'Go down to your house, and wash your feet.' Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king.

⁹But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. ¹⁰When they told David, 'Uriah did not go down to his house', David said to Uriah, 'You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?'

¹¹Uriah said to David, '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; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing.'

¹²Then David said to Uriah, 'Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.' So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, ¹³David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

¹⁴In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. ¹⁵In the letter he wrote, 'Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die.'

And indeed, that is exactly what happened. The noble Uriah was killed in battle.

In light of what the people expected of their king, we can see that David was in trouble right from verse 1. At the time of the year **“when kings go out to battle ... David remained at Jerusalem.”**

Already, in this neat little piece of foreshadowing, David was forsaking his duty. The duty of a king was to go out front and fight a nation’s battles. But David sent his men out and he remained in Jerusalem.

And it only got worse.

While in Jerusalem, David saw and coveted a woman. In this whole chapter, the writer uses the name Bathsheba only once. Otherwise, she is “a woman,” “the woman,” the “daughter of Eliam,” the “wife of Uriah the Hittite” and “the wife of Uriah.”

Whereas Uriah’s name is mentioned 14 times in this passage, Bathsheba’s is mentioned only once. The writer’s interest is not in the character of Bathsheba, but in setting her up as the wife of another man.

And it is against God’s law to covet the wife of another man. It is against God’s law to commit adultery with the wife of another man.

Sure enough, the woman becomes pregnant. At first David hatches a simple plot. He arranges for Uriah to come back and sleep with his wife, so when the baby is born, everyone will assume it is Uriah’s.

That is the meaning of David's command to **"Go down to your house, and wash your feet."** Those words are a Hebrew euphemism for "Go to your house and have relations with your wife."

But now comes the unexpected part of the story. Uriah, who is a Hittite, not even an Israelite, won't do it. While his fellow soldiers are on the battlefield, he will not enjoy the comforts of his own bed nor the pleasures of his own wife. Even when King David gets him drunk, Uriah will not do these simple things that he perceives as disloyal to his comrades.

And so King David abuses his power in the most despicable way possible. He orders Uriah's death on the battlefield.

In so doing, he assures that not only Uriah dies, but that other men fighting alongside him are killed. We see that later in the chapter.

All so King David could get away with adultery. We also learn later that when Bathsheba finished mourning her husband, she became David's wife and bore him a son. And then comes this very quiet, but very scary, conclusion: **"But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."**

David may have thought he got away with adultery and murder. But as we learn in the next few chapters, there were consequences. Oh, were there consequences.

From that moment on, David's royal house became a snakepit of sibling rivalry and rape and murder.

It started when the infant son that resulted from David and Bathsheba's adultery died.

It continued when David's son Amnon raped his sister Tamar. Another son Absalom murdered Amnon to avenge his sister. In later years, Absalom usurped David's throne, before he was finally killed by David's men.

Presumably, no one knew about David and Bathsheba except God and the prophet Nathan. David certainly faced no human court for murder.

But the consequences! Oh, the consequences.

When we live in community, very few of our words or behaviors or actions exist in isolation. They have impact on those around us.

When we speak with kindness, we can build someone up, give them courage, give them confidence. When we speak with contempt, we can tear someone down, kill their initiative, undermine their confidence.

Our very words carry consequences.

This is what I find most distressing about our current national leader, the unrelenting, abusive, belittling nature of his language. Historically, that kind of language has been left behind when the campaign ended. But now it's part of our daily national discourse.

There are consequences now. And I hate to think what hidden consequences there might be in the future.

In our work with addiction, we hear people say, "It's my life. I'm not hurting anybody but me." They say that about their habitual drunkenness, about their crack habit, about cutting themselves off from spouses and children and parents and siblings.

But that is simply not the case. They are hurting the parents who grieve for them. They are hurting the sons and daughters who are growing up without them. They are hurting anyone who looks to them for guidance.

Despite our best efforts, some consequences are unintended, unforeseen. I believe Greenville's City Council was caught by surprise when they discovered that we had lost thousands of affordable housing units over the past decade – going from a surplus of 800 to a deficit of 2,500.

They thought they were rehabbing substandard housing. The unintended consequence was rising rents and pushing longtime residents out.

We usually think of consequences as negative, but that's not necessarily so. Consequences can be positive as well.

Stop smoking and your lungs begin to heal.

Get sober and hold down a job and get housing.

Go to a United Ministries' graduation ceremony and see the happy consequences for people who have earned their GEDs.

Here at Triune, we frequently get letters and phone calls from men in drug rehab or women in safe housing. But just about as often, we get calls from people who have gotten clean with minimal effort from us. Yet, they call to thank us – for the meals, for the worship services, for the place to rest, for the kind word.

I'll often say, "I don't feel like we did anything for you." But they assure me that the consequence of having Triune simply open and welcoming is sometimes all it takes.

We Christians do not live in isolation. Every word, every behavior and every action carries a consequence, for good or evil.

In the black and white story of King David's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, the biblical writer spells out those consequences. Death. Bloodshed. Family feuds.

The consequences of our actions may not be so easy to see, so easy to define. But in Christian community, they are there.

Whether for discouragement and hurt and grief.

Or for encouragement and gratitude and hope.

Amen.