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October 20, 2024

2 Samuel 11.1-13

David was a man after God's own heart, but he did a terrible thing. And then he did more terrible things to cover up his first terrible thing. But let's start at the beginning. David's first sin was that he let his men go to war without him, though it was custom that kings go into battle with their troops. His second sin was that while he wasn't off to war and was walking on his rooftop he spotted a woman below bathing in presumed privacy. Rather than averting his eyes, he sent for her and used his power and position to sleep with her, and she became pregnant. David's third sin was that he sent for her husband from the battlefield in hopes that he would also sleep with Bathsheba and thus cover up the source of her pregnancy. His fourth sin was that when that did not work (because Uriah was too honorable to enjoy the comforts of home while his fellow soldiers were on the battlefield) he ordered his military commander to create conditions that would kill Uriah in battle, clearing the way for David to take Bathsheba for his wife. David's fifth sin was that the plan to kill Uriah also killed many other soldiers. David's sixth sin was that when the messenger returned with news of the dead soldiers, David responded callously, "Do not let this matter trouble you, for the sword devours now one and now another."

David sinned. But David was the king, and so he could do so with impunity. No one dared challenge him on his abuses. He had the power, and he used it. But then, the Lord sent Nathan to David. Nathan comes with a parable about a rich and poor man and their animals. A rich man has much, but when it's time to feed a guest, he takes the single ewe from the poor man. The poor man can't do anything about what the rich man has done.

David is outraged, as anyone should be. "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die." David has missed the point of the parable. He doesn't see his own actions reflected in Nathan's story. So, Nathan connects the dots for him: "you

are the man!” Nathan tells David that God had given him everything and would have given him more if it had not been enough. But instead, David took what was not his.

Perhaps surprisingly, David confesses to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

In case you have been living under a rock, you know that we have an election coming up in this country. If there were a contest for who hates elections most in the entire world, pastors would at least be a contender for first place. At the risk of being a bit self-indulgent, I want to share a bit about what election season is like for us. Pastors minister to a wide variety of people with a wide variety of perspectives, needs, and ideas. In this room there are those I know will be voting straight ticket one color and those voting straight ticket the other, and every combination in between. And I love all of you. And I am called to serve all of you. But I am also called to give voice to God’s politics in this place, politics that are challenging for *all of us*, myself included.

And yet, I too am human, with my own personal perspectives and ideas, and just because I am called to give voice to God’s politics does not mean my politics are aligned with God’s, nor that I can claim to conclusively know how God would vote were God given a ballot. The discernment to know what to say and when to say it often feels beyond my abilities.

It feels cowardly to say nothing. It feels risky to say anything.

There are those who have urged me to say nothing. “The church is the only place we can escape politics. Don’t bring that in here.” And, with my pastor hat on, I see the wisdom in that advice. People need a literal sanctuary from the chaos and the mudslinging going on out there.

Notably, there is literally no one who has urged me to say something. But I don’t only wear the hat of pastor. I am also meant to wear the hats of prophet and preacher and teacher. And in those roles, I know there are some important things that need to be said.

The Political Machine in this country has adeptly and strategically silenced the witness of the church. The Political Machine employs two main strategies to

accomplish this, and different churches are vulnerable to one or the other. Strategy A is easier to spot. Strategy A invites the church into the pocket of one party. Convince a church that one color upholds Christian or biblical values and the other is hostile to them. Convince a church that one color or the other is “their people” fighting for what matters to them.

This strategy invites churches to outsource their political witness. And who wouldn’t want to do that if we could? The problems in this world are exhausting! And complicated! And hard! This strategy is alluring, because the church no longer has to think about anything related to politics, because the party will do that for them. But the church cannot trust anyone to do this work for us. We cannot trust those who seek power to manage our witness.

Strategy B is the strategy that is most dangerous to churches like ours. Strategy B exploits our love for one another and the Christian community we have. I suspect many of you are tense right now worrying I will say something that will upset someone and cause conflict or cause someone to leave the church. I feel that tension too. We want to maintain this special thing we have, and talking about politics is certainly the fastest way to torpedo this “good thing,” right? So, we don’t talk about politics and that works pretty well for us. Except, taken to its logical conclusion, the church that avoids all things political becomes a church that just doesn’t really matter too much in the “real world.” And that is right where the Political Machine wants us. Irrelevant.

Strategy B depends on what I call the BVC, the “bipartisan vacuum cleaner.” The bipartisan vacuum cleaner sucks up every single issue that the church might want to have a say about, splits it between red and blue positions, and then tells the church that to take a position is to engage in partisanship. Strategy B counts on us being so scared of losing this precious thing that we will comply with their sorting system. Every issue affecting our life together becomes coded as red or blue and suddenly eating a Chick fil A sandwich is a political statement.

When the “BVC” sucks up issue after issue, the church has fewer and fewer things we can talk about. And before you know it, what we have left that we can talk about is so abstract and “spiritualized” that it can’t make a practical tangible difference

in the world. A spirituality that does not touch the ground is worthless. And that is where “Strategy B” wants us: talking in the abstract about love and peace and kindness without ever actually trying to push for the world to be more loving, peaceful, or kind.

In the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry, he withdraws for 40 days into the wilderness where he fasts and is tempted by the devil. The final temptation, according to Matthew and Luke, has the devil bringing Jesus up to a high mountain, where he can see all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And the devil lies to Jesus. He says, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” The lie is that the kingdoms of the earth are the devil’s to give away. The devil does not have that kind of power. The devil is not sovereign. Only God is sovereign.

This same lie is told by the Political Machine in our day. “If you will bow down and worship” this color party or that color party, then the whole world will be yours. But we must not bow. We bow to God alone. What is more, this claim by the Political Machine is a lie. The world is not theirs to give. It belongs to God.

The person leading the meeting creates the agenda. And for too long the church has allowed the Political Machine to believe it leads the meeting. The Political Machine has created the agenda and told the church its place within it. And we have complied. But the agenda is not the Political Machine’s to make. The agenda is God’s to make, and the Church is meant to bear witness to that agenda.

We know God’s agenda from Scripture: God’s agenda is abundance. God’s agenda is to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. God’s agenda gives special attention to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned, and anyone else the world has relegated to the status of “the least of these.” God’s agenda is love of neighbor *and love of enemy*.

But the Political Machine and its BVC have had great success in keeping the church silent on God’s agenda. By making every issue partisan, the Political Machine has left the church afraid to speak about the things that are most important to God. We must reject the Political Machine’s terms of debate, that there are two sides to every issue—red and blue. We must reject what Strategy B depends on, that the church will be too afraid to take a side. As Christians, we are not meant to avoid taking sides. In

fact, we *must* take sides. But the sides are not red vs. blue. The sides are God's agenda vs. any competing one, and we are meant to defend God's agenda.

Strategy B counts on us being committed to being *peacekeepers*. But Jesus does not say "blessed are the peacekeepers." He says, "blessed are the *peacemakers*." We are called not to be peacekeepers, but to be *peacemakers*. Peacekeepers are silent. Peacemakers speak up in pursuit of peace that is (as of yet) out of reach.

Strategy B seeks to paralyze the church from having a voice on issues that are at the very top of God's agenda. Strategy B wants us silent on what affects the "least of these" in our world, such as the treatment of immigrants, the death penalty and the treatment of prisoners, care for pregnant women and the babies they carry, gun violence in our cities and even our schools, climate change and its disproportionate impact on already disadvantaged communities, equal access to education, war with a staggering civilian death toll, to name just a few. **Don't we believe the Church should have something to say on such important issues?**

Both Strategies A and B are meant to prevent a Nathan from walking into the halls of power to call out missteps. Strategy A asks the church to trust a political party to enact God's agenda. No need for the church to think any more or question anything. We'll take it from here. Strategy B seeks to hamstring the church by daring it to wade into waters the Political Machine has declared partisan, where every moral stand will "out" you as a blue or red. We must not succumb to either strategy.

David got away with it. There was no stopping that. But his actions did not go by without notice. Nathan's confrontation prompted David's repentance. Some might say we are naïve if we think our confrontation of the misuses of power by our elected officials will ever elicit their repentance. But at a minimum, they will know that God's Church is watching, that we bear witness to their actions and inaction.

We don't know who will win the elections—who will make up our County Council or who will control the Congress or who will be our next president. But for the Church's role as prophet, it doesn't actually matter who sits in the chair. Because *whoever* is chosen for those roles, our job is the same. That's right, even if the candidates you vote

for are elected. . .perhaps *especially* if the people you vote for are elected, we must be the ones to hold them accountable to God's agenda, rejecting the premise that the Political Machine gets to run the meeting. The Church must reclaim its voice, resisting all strategies to keep us quiet.

We must remember that no party has our primary allegiance. We must remember that no nation has our primary allegiance. Our primary allegiance is to God and the values of His Kingdom. And so, no matter the results of election day, let us resist the strategies the Political Machine employs to keep us silent, and recommit ourselves to being a conscience for our elected officials. May we find the courage and voice of Nathan.