

My responsibilities at camp last week included helping with evening worship, giving the morning devotion and introduction to the day's bible theme, and teaching bible study for junior and senior high school. I also was a judge for the biggest splash competition at the pool party and read bedtime stories to the rowdiest of the elementary boys' cabins, although the only one who fell asleep while I was reading was the counselor. Those of us who have spent more than a couple years working in Lutheran camping have often joked that although every year the curriculum has a different catchy title, the Bible studies mostly rotate through a very limited list of stories. So I was not at all surprised to see that the appointed text for Wednesday was David and Goliath, which was our Sunday text back in June. However, you can see why today's chapter of David's story has not crossed over to the bible camp curriculum.

At first, David seems to do everything a good king should do. He's a classic biblical underdog, literally shepherding his father's sheep, all but forgotten when Samuel comes to anoint him king. David slays Goliath, but he's not all brawn and no brains; he has musical talent as well as a strategic mind. Even when Saul is trying to kill him, he forgoes the chance to retaliate and acts in good faith. He deeply mourns the loss of his dear friend Jonathan. And last week we read that, although the Lord doesn't take him up on the offer, David wanted to honor the Lord by building a temple. It would seem that if anyone is going to be a good king, it would be David. But look how far he falls:

It's the time of year when kings go out to battle, but David does *not* go out to battle. He sends his nephew Joab, the officers, and all of Israel's army out to fight while he stays at home on the couch. Continuing the theme of David being where he's not supposed to be, he uses his roof as a vantage point to watch a woman taking a bath. He finds out that she is married, but he still sends messengers to get her—as if she is not a person but a thing to be acquired. Aside from any question of physical force, by virtue of David's power and position as king, Bathsheba does not have the option to say no, which means she can't in any real sense give her consent. When David hears that Bathsheba is pregnant, he attempts a cover-up and calls her husband home from the battlefield, hoping

that if Uriah spends the night with her, he'll assume when she gives birth that the baby is his. But Uriah—who is a Hittite, so a soldier in David's army but not even a full-fledged member of the nation of Israel—acts more honorably than the king of Israel; Uriah refuses to enjoy an evening at home while the other soldiers are camping out in the open. David tries again by getting him drunk, but Uriah still has too much integrity to accept the king's special favors. So David instructs Joab to send Uriah to the frontline to be killed, by a letter that David forces Uriah himself to carry. Uriah is so honest that he either doesn't break the seal and read the letter, or he does but he delivers it anyway. David has now abused his power in just about all the ways Samuel warned the people a king would when they rejected God's vision for Israel and demanded an earthly ruler. And all of these awful things David did, he was well within his rights to do, because so far as the law is concerned, the king can do whatever he wants. Yet God was watching.

This is not the end of David's story—not even the end of this chapter of David's story. There will be consequences for David's actions, though Bathsheba will suffer as well, in spite of really having no choice in the matter. And of course, consequences aside, David still lives, and Uriah still dies. Today you only get the first half of a sermon, since we only read the first half of the story. And there is no good news in this part of the story. *Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely* is not even news, let alone *good* news. We already know that in this world the rules don't apply equally to everyone, power and position insulate some people from accountability, the public expects and even excuses corruption from some—while showing no mercy to others, and like Uriah, sometimes the people who do everything right still end up as the collateral damage of the carelessness, greed, and cruelty of others...and it often seems as if nobody notices and nobody cares. Yet, God sees, and God cares. And even if everyone else forgets the ones who bear the brunt of injustice, God remembers. So, in the first chapter of his gospel, where Matthew records Jesus' lineage, he says: *Jesse was the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah*—because David may have thought Uriah was expendable, but God didn't think so. All of us are precious to the Lord.