

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Corruption of Power Third Week in Ordinary Time Friday, January 31, 2014
8:15 AM **2 Sm 11:1-4a, 5-10, 13-17;** Mk 4:26-34 (The betrayal of trust that is given to everyone who has authority)

Today we read from the Second Book of Samuel the famous story of David and Bathsheba, but of course it's not really about David and Bathsheba; it's **about David and about how he becomes corrupt**. The corruption isn't really primarily lust; that's part of it; it's not the whole at all. It's rather that he becomes corrupt because **power entails responsibilities**, but the great temptation of those in power is to take the privilege and not the responsibilities, to exercise authority but not to fulfill duties. This is what David is like.

First of all, it starts out: **“At the turn of the year, when kings go out on campaign, David sent out Joab.”** Well, Joab wasn't the king. What's he sending him out for? **It was David's responsibly to go out on campaign**. He was the king. **Power has gone to his head**. He thinks he can now sit on the throne, wear the crown, give the orders, but not take the responsibilities, the duties, and the risks of power, of kingship, of authority. This is corruption. I believe probably **every person in authority in the world** in whatever area is tempted in this way. Wherever a person has power over others there's a **temptation to exercise the power**, even to lord it over others, **but not to really serve** them, not to be dutiful toward them.

So then we see the next thing he is doing is taking a siesta, apparently a very long one; he doesn't get up until the evening. Then he takes a walk on the roof of his palace. You can imagine him seeing everything in sight and thinking: “All this is mine. I am the boss. **I am the owner of everything. I can do what I want.**” Bathsheba plays into that because he sees her. Whether she is aware of this or not, is not stated. In other words, it's not clear whether

she is making herself available or not. But the point is he thinks everything is his. **This is a terrible mistake. This is a sin.**

It leads to **another sin**: the lying to Uriah and then the entrapment of Uriah and then the **killing of Uriah**. And of course who goes along with all this, but Joab? Joab was already taking the king's role leading the troops. Now he will take the king's role in committing murder. That's another lesson that the Bible really wants us to understand, that **when people in power abuse their power, abuse their authority, they have accomplices always**. That's why I sometimes am puzzled, baffled even, by people who talk about dictators. They talk about the evil Hitler or the evil Stalin or the evil Mao or the evil whoever. All that's true to a point, but there has never been a dictator who didn't have lots and lots of supporters and collaborators. This is why the problem isn't the dictator. **It's the web of collaborators all around him that don't serve objective truth, who also are not dutiful.**

So there is a lot in this story. It's a lot about human life. It's a lot about human history. It's a lot about the betrayal of trust that is given to everyone who has authority.