

**She Was Taking a Bath**  
**Sunday, September 26, 2021, 11:30 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena**  
**The Rev. Mike Kinman**

*And it happened near the evening that David rose from his lying-place and went walking about on the roof of the palace and he saw a woman bathing from the roof;*

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She was taking a bath.

Maybe it was the one moment of the day ... maybe it was the one moment of the *week* she had to herself.

The one moment where, unencumbered by responsibility or expectation, her mind, her spirit could dare to wander.

She could feel the water on her skin and enjoy her body.

*Her* body.

For just these few brief minutes, her body was her own.

*Her* body. She could dream, realize or even just hope that could be true.

*Her* body.

She could caress her body.

Enjoy her body.

Love her body.

Thousands of years later, we still know these moments.

It's why still some of our best thinking happens in the shower.

It's why we collapse into a hot bath and pray for just a few solitary minutes without interruption.

For somehow time to be suspended as the water seeps into our pores. As the steam causes beads of sweat to form on our forehead.

It is why we sigh as our back settles into the tub or as the water pours over our head.

In a world where we are increasingly on display.

Where we never know what Alexa is really listening to.

Where a video of us ordering coffee could be trending before the cup is empty.

Where everything we say and do,  
our job performance,  
our parenting or our lack of children,  
the way we dress,  
every interaction we have is not only fair game for comment and disparagement in whispers or brief conversations in parking lots but under the stage lights of the comment sections on social media.

In a world where the demands of our jobs, of our lives not only capture every waking moment but seep into our dreams ... when we let it -- or for some when we are permitted it -- there still can be something uniquely sacred about this simple act of water pouring over our body. Of our body soaking in water.

Our scripture, our faith tells us that we are created in the image of God. That we are good. That our bodies are good. That we, that our bodies are not good only if someone else or even if we deem them to be ... they just are.

Our bodies are the delight of God. Just as they are and as they are becoming. And God creates us as embodied people for us to enjoy our bodies and gives us the power to invite others to enjoy our bodies and to join with us in that enjoyment.

And part of being created in God's image means that choice, that power, that jurisdiction over our own bodies is our own.

Mutual invitation.

Enthusiastic consent.

Safe words.

These are the guardians of the sacred power we are meant to have over our own body.

Taking a bath ... alone unless we extend the invitation ... unless we choose to invite someone else to share this intimate act ... is a sacrament. It is the baptism not into something new but an immersive outward and visible sign of the eternal truth that our bodies are sacred, our bodies are beautiful, our bodies are our own.

She was taking a bath.

We know basically nothing about Bathsheba. Everything about her that is communicated to us is not really about her but about who she is in relationship to men. Even her name, as Dr. Wil Gafney, who gives us the translation of this reading this morning and elaborates about her in her book Womanist Midrash ... even her name, Dr. Gafney tells us, is not about her but about others.

She is “Bat-Sheva bat Eliam, which literally means ‘daughter of an oath.’ She is (someone else’s) promise kept. The nature of the promise is not revealed; she may have been the answer to the prayer of a couple who struggled to conceive.”

Truthfully, we do not even know if Bathsheba was a “she.” For all we know, Bathsheba might have been a he, might have longed to change his body to match his identity, but that was millennia away from even being a possibility.

So for tradition’s sake, we will continue to call Bathsheba “she” ... and as she grew, probably earlier than we might imagine, she became “wife of Uriah.” Her body went from being the property of her father to the property of her husband. Not for one second was it her own.

Except in this moment, she could imagine.

In this moment, she could dream.

She was taking a bath.

And yet, even in this moment she had to be careful. Public nudity was not acceptable but rather considered shameful. Bathing on the roof was not an act of exhibitionism or seduction. She was not inviting anyone’s gaze but her own. She was using the only space available to her ... and in fact if she thought she might be in view of anyone, she would have gone through the clumsy task of washing without disrobing.

Showing her body was not acceptable, not just because naked flesh was seen as shameful but that a woman’s body specifically was seen as a temptation to men – and the burden fell not on men not to rape or otherwise violate her but on her to walk the tightrope between being pleasing to her husband and otherwise veiled to the world. Whether she was pleasing to herself ...how she felt about her body ... that mattered less, and to most not at all.

She was taking a bath. In that moment, Bathsheba was as free as she was likely ever to be ... and yet still expectations and burdens crept in but she probably did not even notice them because they were all she had ever known. They were all she would ever know.

And yet she could expect to be free of some things.

She could expect to be free of another's gaze.

She could expect to be free of another's touch.

And yet even this brief moment in a life where brief moments were all that were afforded her or any woman. Even this brief moment was violated.

And thousands of years later even in the telling, the violation continues.

Even in the telling, we dehumanize her.

Even in the telling, we blame her.

Even in the telling, we consider only the perspective of her rapist ... for his perspective is seemingly all that matters.

*And it happened near the evening that David rose from his lying-place and went walking about on the roof of the palace and he saw a woman bathing from the roof; the woman was extraordinarily beautiful in appearance. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "Is not this Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" And David sent messengers and he took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her.*

Again, Dr. Gafney helps us, reminding us, first of all, that this is nothing new for David. "Bathsheba is the ninth individual woman linked intimately to David." Were that true for Bathsheba, she would be shunned or even killed. For David, it is a footnote if not a source of pride.

And then there is her beauty. Dr. Gafney notes that when the text says "Bathsheba is a beautiful woman. This is not a neutral statement or entirely in praise of her and her beauty. While David will be held accountable for his sin against her, the text insinuates that her beauty is partially to blame."

Traci Blackmon often reminds us of the Zimbabwean proverb, "until the lioness tells her story, the hunter will always be the hero."

There is a hunter in this story, and we still lionize him as hero – the great King David. Gospel writers take pains to let us know that Jesus stands in his line.

I wonder ... what would Bathsheba's telling of the story look like? I can scarcely imagine ... and yet I know there are those among us here who can imagine only too well. Who have your own stories of violation and imprisonment, abuse and rape. Of being told you are responsible for men's actions because of how you look or act or dress. Of being judged if your body is unappealing to a man and being told you were assaulted because it was too appealing.

Of having even that most sacred of moments, you alone in the bath, violated because there is nowhere you can escape the memory, the fear, the voices that lie and say maybe the people who are telling you it was your fault ... are right.

The story scripture tells about Bathsheba gets basically everything about it wrong if we believe that God is good and just. Not just telling it from the perspective of David and the weaponization of Bathsheba's appearance against her ... but everything.

A rape is couched in consensual language and yet it is clear it was a rape because she was kidnapped and consent was not possible because she did not have the power to refuse him.

And it doesn't stop there. When she realizes she is pregnant, we do not hear the fear in her voice. If her husband discovered her pregnancy, he could have her killed ... so even the act of finding a messenger who would tell David that his rape had conceived a child and yet would not tell her husband was a dice roll where her life hung in the balance.

She was, of course, not given any choice but to carry the fetus that was the result of rape to full term, subjecting her to further trauma she did not choose.

And then ... then ... when the violation is finally acknowledged, the victim is not deemed to be her but her husband. And her rapist's remedy is to have her husband killed and Bathsheba forced to marry her rapist.

And from here I'll let Dr. Gafney tell the rest of the story:

"A pregnant Bathsheba enters the home that David shares with six other women (Abigail, Ahinoam, Maacah, Haggith, Abital, Eglah) and their children. Somewhere Michal, a seventh woman, is locked away. Unlike Abigail, Bathsheba does not have serving women from her former life to accompany her. Other women are there, at the very least, serving women and midwives. Does Bathsheba have someone she considers a friend? How much interaction does she have with David's other women? What is that interaction like?"

And then finally God steps in. Finally. At last, someone will see Bathsheba's agony and rescue her. But in this telling, God seems to care not a bit for Bathsheba's pain, but rather only for what David has done to Uriah ... the punishment for what is essentially seen as property damage ... is to kill the child that came from the rape.

So Bathsheba has to carry the fetus to full term, go through labor and then after all that, as she finally holds her son in her arms ... to watch him die. Even David's punishment punishes Bathsheba more than him.

Finally, in the next chapter of Second Samuel, Dr. Gafney continues that "the prophet Nathan crafts a parable to confront David about his sin. To represent Bathsheba, Nathan famously uses

a lamb.... Bathsheba isn't even a person in Nathan's famous accusatory rhetoric: she is a farm animal."

When people tell me they don't believe in God.

When people say religion is just a tool of subjugation.

When particularly women ... or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer persons ... or people whose skin is a darker hue than mine ... say they can't just bring themselves to go into a church.

When Andre Henry sings

Preacher So-and-So

He don't got no good news for me

Even though I'm seein' bodies hit the street like Autumn leaves

He say "All I know is Jesus

Man, that's all I know to preach"

I guess Jesus doesn't care if I get killed by the police

Come on

This could not be the truth

This shit is not good news

If it's gon' be that way

I don't think I'll go to church this Sunday

When Andre sings that, I don't blame him. And I certainly understand anyone who doesn't trust the church or want anything to do with the God we project because our record is not good.

And we're all a part of it. So we can't just say, "Well, that's them ... but we're not like that ... we're the good church" because it's deep in all of our family history. Patriarchy, misogyny, cisheterosexism, white supremacy ... it is the air we breathe and the water in which we bathe. We are shaped by it in ways we are just beginning to understand, and it is always easier to turn away than to face it

... unless of course you are Bathsheba

... and all you want to do is take a bath in safety.

... all you want to do is take a bath in peace.

And yet here is the hope ... and it is a sure and certain hope.

We are made in the image of God ... each and every one of us. And that doesn't just mean that your body is good ... though it certainly means that.

It means that YOU are good.

All of you.

That we are all participating in these toxic systems doesn't make us bad people and it certainly doesn't mean that we aren't lovable. You, me ... all of us ... are made in God's image and we are infinitely good and infinitely lovable and nothing can change that.

Where we in our humanity stumble continuously is living into that identity. And that is why we are here. That is why despite all the ways church might have damaged us in the past and all the ways that church has not only failed to tear down these systems of oppression but has continually propped them up, we are still here, and we are still trying.

It is why we at All Saints Church say, "we walk with a revolutionary Jesus" – because what was revolutionary about Jesus was that he set a table and said everyone gets an equal seat because everyone has a right to the dignity of their own seat ... and their own choice ... and their own voice. And those who have been abused and marginalized the most will get their voices heard the loudest because healing can only happen when we acknowledge the wounds.

We aren't beginning a long study of white supremacy culture and our complicity in it to shame ourselves or out of some lame desire to be woke or appear righteous.

We aren't standing up against the continual attack on not just healthcare but basic human rights for women, nonbinary and transgender persons because we want to burnish our liberal credentials.

We aren't saying yes, Andre, we actually do think Jesus cares if you get killed by the police because we think it's fashionable to stand with movements for black lives.

Not that I wouldn't blame anyone for being skeptical and thinking that those are actually the reasons we are doing these things. Again, the church's record in this area is not good.

But no ... we are committing to these things because we walk with a revolutionary Jesus, loving without judgment, embracing life joyfully, reverently inviting all faiths and peoples into relationship for the healing and transformation of ourselves, our community and the world.

We are committing to these things, as All Saints Church has strived to do in every generation, because we believe, as Bill Cunliffe sings in the anthem he wrote about our core values –

*We are all equally loved by God, dependent on each other.  
We embrace our differences; we invite you to share God's love.*

*We believe in radical inclusion, we challenge power and privilege.  
We pursue truth relentlessly for trust and reconciliation.  
God is love; we trust in God, Her love makes us whole.*

We are committing to these things because we look around and not only do we hope, “it doesn’t have to be this way”... we actually dare to believe that God working through us can make that change.

That our history need not determine our future. That love is the most powerful force for change in the universe and that

Love.

Heals.

Every.

Body.

We are gathered here today and every time we gather because we know the stories and we have been telling them wrong for way to long. We have made too many hunters heroes and silenced too many lionesses.

We are gathered here today because we get to tell the whole story about ourselves. And we get to write the next chapter and the last. And the stories we tell deserve different endings, better endings, healing endings.

We are gathered here today because all she wanted to do was have a moment, and feel the water on her skin, and imagine for a moment she was safe, imagine for a moment she was free ... and we live in a world that still won’t let her do that.

We are gathered here today because she was taking a bath.

And she should have that right.

And so should we all.

Amen.