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2 Samuel 11:1-15
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Power, institution or person

When I was thinking about this sermon this week, I wondered why King David did the evil things he did, sleeping with Bathseba who was not his wife and getting Uriah killed, was it because of the power that he had or the person that he was? In the end, I think the question is what kind of system of power do we make. Do we cultivate systems of power where we share power with one another, or is power a zero-sum game where we take as much as we can for ourselves.

Prayer: may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

When my Great Aunt Lucy found out that I was getting a job in Reedley, she told me that she did not like those central valley folks, because they take all the water. And when you hear that, what goes through your mind? Do you get defensive and think to yourselves, well it's LA and San Francisco that take all the water? And that is fine because you all are both right, here in California water is a scarce resource and especially during a drought year we are worried there is not enough to go around. So our elected officials saber rattle about the horror of water reaching the ocean and how we need to build more water retaining infrastructure to make sure we get enough.

And, in this last year and some change, I have learned how important water is for all of you, how it keeps our trees alive, how much fun it is to boat or float down the king's river, how it waters the great Sequoia trees and provides habitat for fish. We all need the water. What I am getting at is the resentment that we feel between each other when we are dealing with a scarce resource. And how it can create a toxic climate of "take take take," where we worry about getting what we need, instead of asking the question, how can we all have enough.

The story of David is a story of take, take, take. King David has everything he needs, money, women, a war of expansion. However, when he sees the beautiful Bathsheba on the rooftop, he sees another thing that he wants. And so he acts like someone in the "take take take" mindset, not worrying about making sure that everyone has enough, but instead only worrying about what he can have for himself. And so he takes Bathsheba, treating her as a piece of property. What David did was selfish and adultery, because he was sleeping with another man's wife. And when that other man, Uriah, became a liability for him. When David was worried that his sin would be found out, he again acted in a selfish take, take, take manor and took Uriah's life. Deciding that the scarce resource of his honor was more important than a human life.

I wonder if this is what Samuel was warning about when he warned the Israelite people against having a king, “he will TAKE your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; 12 and he will TAKE for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. 13 He will TAKE your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 He will TAKE the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. 15 He will TAKE one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. 16 He will TAKE your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. 17 He will TAKE one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. 18 And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you on that day.”

Samuel is warning against a system of take, take, take. And David is not just the abuser of the system of take, take, take. He is also a victim.

Something David is really bad at is family matters. In the passage we heard today, we learn that David has formed his family by taking what he wants; however, it is important to note that his family does the same to him when it suits them. When David is at his deathbed, he wants to make the eldest son Adonijah, but Bathsheba, Solomon’s mother, convinces David to make her son king. She who was taken, now is in the position of power, so she follows David’s example and take, take, takes.

If we are take take take, what happens when we are on our deathbeds?

This is indeed a cautionary tale that we can learn a lot from. But my beloved, I think I would be a bad pastor if I left you with this negative warning from the Bible, so I will give you a positive message of hope that we can strive toward together. How do we not follow the same patterns of take, take, take? How do we deal with toxic power dynamics in our families, churches, and our communities? So that when we are on our deathbeds, we will not reap what we sowed. And so let’s return to our old friend Paul, who we spent the last few weeks exploring. In this second letter to the Corinthians, Paul is trying to raise some money for the saints in Israel.

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” - 2 Corinthians 9:6-9

If we are all cheerful givers, and not takers, then there will always be enough for all. This is to say that grace should abound so that a cheerful giver may give freely and generously, because they know that one day they might be that person in need. How do we treat our children? With love, so that when our hair turns white, they will return that same love that we cheerfully gifted to them as children? How do we treat each other in church? With love and respect, so that when we are in need people will bring us food and invite us over for parties. It is no mistake that Paul says over and over again that the whole law is fulfilled in love.

I do not say to be cheerful givers so that others can walk all over you or to ignore the call to justice. I believe that Paul is worried about how we make our relationships, how we refuse to form giver/needful relationships, but instead look at how we will all be needy at some point in our lives. That we all need love, recognition, belonging, and safety. We are all humans and we should look at how we can live in a family, church, and community where we are not worried about having enough living water of God's unending grace for ourselves, but make sure that there is enough living water for all people.