



# ST BART'S

A Sermon by

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## We are the Bread of Life

*Sermon preached at the eleven o'clock service, August 2, 2015*

*The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost—Based on 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a and John 6:24-35*

The story of David that we read from the Second Book of Samuel has a back-story. The back-story was alluded to in the lesson, and now I would like to make it a little more explicit. King David had slept with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, a soldier away fighting one of the King's battles. She had become pregnant. David found this problematic. So David brought Uriah back from the army for a home visit, hoping that Uriah would sleep with his wife; when the child was born, Uriah would think that it was his child. When David heard that Uriah refused to go into his house and to sleep with his wife because his men were still at war, he got worried. David sent Uriah back to the front with a letter to the commander asking him to arrange for Uriah to be killed in battle. After Uriah's death our lesson picks up with David's taking Bathsheba and making her his wife. Nothing is said about how she felt about these arrangements. After the confrontation with David, Nathan the Prophet predicts bad things for the nation and for David arising out of David's sin. The lesson ends with David confessing his sin, saying, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan then goes on to say to David that "the Lord has put away your sin and you shall not die."

I like this story because it reminds us that even good King David, a shepherd of humble origin, misused his royal privilege and sinned horribly. It reminds us that there are real consequences to sin. It also reminds us that sins, even horrible sins, can be forgiven and that God's mercy can even extend to someone like David and even someone like me. I also like this story because David seems so clueless about his sin. It reminds me that most people most of the time are not waking up in the morning thinking, "I am going to sin today." No one gets up in the morning and says, "I am going to be racist today." Most people most of the time do not wake up thinking, "I am going to commit adultery today." Most people—and dare I say most of us—are most of the time clueless about the sins we commit, or we justify whatever wrong thing we are doing in our own heads and then live their lives as if nothing is wrong. If we become aware that something is not right, we can project that sense of not rightness on to some other person, perhaps even the victim of the sin; and we blame the other person or the institution. All that it takes is some therapist, priest, neighbor, spouse, friend, or even a child to ask the right question, and we are busted.

Early this year I had a moment with a Nathan. I had what at the time appeared to be a big decision to make. I was not sure what to do. I had done my research and considered the options, and I could not make a decision. I wanted to get it right and did not want to make a mistake. When I said my prayers, I asked God what I should do. And as happens in those cases when I ask for specific advice, God was silent. I decided to ask friends, and so I consulted our then-rector Buddy Stallings. A few days after I sought and received his advice, we were on the elevator in the Community House. He asked what I had done, and I told him that I still had not decided. And before the elevator had descended from the second floor and opened on the Lobby level he looked me in the eyes and said, "Edward, what are you waiting for? A sign? This is your life, not a rehearsal!" Nathan had spoken. It was a moment that helped me to realize I needed to make this decision now: that I had to stop worrying about getting it right and living my life as if it were a rehearsal in preparation for some really big show. Life is happening now. And so I walked into my office and picked up the phone and announced my decision.

More than just this one decision, I began thinking about the ways that I live my life as a rehearsal. When I live my life as if it were a rehearsal and not life, I am so concerned with getting it right that I fail to act and I miss opportunities. I am more concerned with not being wrong than I am with actually accomplishing things. I live as if there were no consequences to inaction.

There was another time, a long time ago, when I was confronted with my own much more serious foolishness by another Nathan. I was in El Salvador in 1991 to improve my Spanish, or at least that is what I told the Bishop who funded my trip. In 1991 there was a Civil War going on in El Salvador, and I had requested to go El Salvador not only to improve my

Spanish, but also to provide *acompañamiento* to a Spanish-born Episcopal priest friend of mine. My friend, Luis, had been jailed by the government after six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and daughter had been killed. He was released only because of the intervention of the Episcopal Church and the American and Spanish governments. After spending some time with me in Los Angeles, he had returned to his parish and lived with post-traumatic stress disorder.

One day I took a trip to visit a mountain village about a six-hour bus ride from San Salvador. Two deacons offered to accompany me so I would not get lost. After three uncomfortable hours in a hot, overcrowded bus, five armed soldiers stopped the bus. We were forced to get out and show our papers. Everyone was allowed to get back on the bus except for the gringo priest. My deacon friends realized what had happened and managed to scramble off the bus to join me on the side of the road, just before the bus pulled away. The three of us and five heavily-armed soldiers stood by the side of the road for about three hours waiting for the next bus. I get bored easily, and before long I decided to practice my Spanish on the soldiers. I began to ask them why I was not permitted to proceed northward. All they would say was that it was too dangerous. I asked if it was that dangerous, why had they permitted the Salvadorans to proceed and save me, an American, from the danger. I continued on this line of reasoning until my Spanish gave out. Fortunately, at that time, I spoke very little Spanish.

Later, after we got on the empty southbound bus, I realized that the deacons were not speaking to me and appeared very upset. When I asked what was wrong, one of the deacons asked why I had questioned the soldiers. Didn't I know that the soldiers might kill us? I reminded the deacon that the soldiers had admitted that they had to protect me because of their government's reliance on US aid. One of the deacons looked away, and the other looked at me in shocked disbelief. With a rage and a sadness in his eyes, he said, "Yes, they had to protect you, but they could have killed us to teach you a lesson. And then would you have taken care of our wives and families?"

Needless to say, I didn't sleep that whole night. I tried to figure out what had happened. I tried to excuse myself and figure out some justification, some reason, for what I had done. Perhaps I was under too much stress or the fact that I was not in my own country or speaking my own language. Try as I might to find an excuse, there was none. I had sinned horribly. I tried to blame someone, even the deacons, but there was no one to blame but me. Then I tried to figure out why nothing bad had happened. Perhaps God had saved me, but if indeed God had saved me, why had he not saved others? There were actually many more worthy people of divine intervention in El Salvador that he had not saved. In the end, I was just lucky. My deacon friends forgave me, and I knew God's mercy in a new and profound way. And I had learned a critical lesson about the privilege of being an Anglo-Saxon, North American male, and no one had died.

Many days life seems so complex and so very complicated that it is tough to know how to act. Questions such as how to restore police/community relationships, how to stop environmental degradation, and how to rectify the injustices of racism, privilege, and economic opportunity are really complex, and it is hard to know how to proceed. These questions are so hard that often the fear of saying something wrong, doing something wrong, or looking foolish stop us from doing anything. We seem doomed to a never-changing cycle of handwringing, finger pointing and blaming. And yet when Jesus says, "I am the bread of life," he is also saying that we as the Body of Christ are the bread of life; and we are called to be bread for our hungry world. We are called to engage. It does not matter how. Stop procrastinating and, as Nike tells us, "Just do it." This is not a rehearsal; this is life. There are many ways to get into action and become bread for the world. Volunteer at the Soup Kitchen, Shelter, or Food Pantry. Go to your local hospital or hospice and volunteer. Join one of the many groups here at the church, such as the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, and take action.

Another way is by supporting Team St. Bart's. This is a group of ten St. Bartians, including the preacher, who will ride our bicycles from Boston to New York at the end of September to support Housing Works and their work to address economic injustice by creating housing for people with HIV/AIDS. I am not saying that the only way to be in action is to go on line or go to the table at the back of the church to support Team St. Bart's between now and the end of September. What I am saying is that each of us must find some way that we can feed the world. Stop looking for a sign and begin living your life and sharing your life with the world. And you will find that you are the bread of life. Do it now and do not be afraid to make mistakes, even tragic mistakes. When we do make mistakes, and we will make mistakes, we can make amends, forgive each other, and forgive ourselves. And we will experience the mercy of God and continue to be the bread of life.

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