Sermon – Above the Law
Scripture Lessons: II Samuel 11: 1-15, John 6:1-21
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Our first scripture reading, II Samuel 11: 1-15, is a powerful and pivotal passage in the life of David which has far-reaching consequences for the King personally as well as the people he serves. The narrative is more than we want to know about this beloved King whose actions betray his faith, who misuses the power entrusted to him by Yahweh, and conducts himself as if he were above the law. David has withdrawn himself from his responsibility as King and from the community of soldiers who depend upon him. This is the word of God.

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.
2 It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. *3 David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite."* *4 So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house.* *5 The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."* *6 So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David.* *7 When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going.* *8 Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king.* *9 But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord and did not go down to his house.* *10 When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?" Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths;*[a] *and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing."* *12 Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day,* *13 David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.* *14 In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah.* *15 In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die." Amen.*

In our second scripture reading, John 6:1-21, we find two miracle stories along the Sea of Galilee. On the shore, Jesus provides food to those who hunger after righteousness, and on the sea, Jesus walks upon the stormy sea bringing his disciples and their boat to a safe crossing. Those who are in the presence of Christ are filled with wonder and fear. John weaves these stories together with strands from the Exodus story so that the reader cannot help but remember the Israelites feeding on the manna from heaven and their safe crossing of the Red Sea. When Jesus comes to the disciples on the water, his response "It is I" is more literally interpreted "I am," the same words spoken by Yahweh when God was revealed to Moses in the burning bush. John wants to be clear about who Christ is! This is the One who as God is above the law, yet as Paul articulates in Philippians 2: though Christ existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped,[7] but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, assuming human likeness. I will begin reading verse 14 following the miraculous feeding of the five thousand with five loafs and two fish. Listen to God's Holy Word.

14 When the people saw the sign that Jesus had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world." 15 When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. 16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. 18 The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. 19 When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. 20 But Jesus said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." 21 Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going. Amen.

The title of the sermon: "Above the Law"

The text: *"In the spring of the year, the time when Kings go out to battle. David remained at Jerusalem." II Samuel 15:1 a & c*

Let us pray: Holy and Loving God, we are grateful for the stories of our faith which keep us accountable to one another and to you. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen

Lies, adultery, and murder are the stuff of this sordid tale from the life of King David. According to theologian Walter Brueggemann, *It has often been remarked that the Bible, unlike much of other ancient literature, does not spare its greatest heroes, but subjects them to the same standards of morality and conduct that are applied to others.*

On this sad and tragic occasion in David's life, one cannot help but reminisce about the shepherd boy whom Samuel anointed, the brave young man who outwitted Goliath, and the king who danced before the ark of the covenant in delight and gratitude.

The biblical author also makes a poignant contrast between King David, who remained in Jerusalem during the time when Kings go out to battle, and Bathsheba's husband, Uriah who refused to have sexual relations while his colleagues are at war.

According to Brueggemann: *The incongruity between their risk and his comfort would be too great and would cause him to betray his very identity. The narrative portrays Uriah, quite in contrast to David, as a man of principle. Uriah's words indict David. Uriah, the Hittite, a foreigner, is not even a child of the Torah. Yet, he is faithful as David once was. It is a stunning moment of disclosure and contrast.*

The prophet Samuel's greatest fear comes to fruition on this tragic and momentous occasion. This is why Samuel, along with Yahweh God, resisted the people's yearning for a king; because kings live as if they are above the law.

The historic misuse of power within monarchies inspired the founders of our country to create a democratic form of government which includes innate checks and balances among the three independent branches. Our government is patterned after the polity within the Presbyterian Church which recognized the need for accountability because of the misuse of power within religion and politics and because of human sin. We sin as individuals, and we also sin through complicity to systemic injustices woven into our culture and society.

As much as we seek to hold accountable those who live as if they were above the law, we also need to recognize the unjust laws which seek to hold others down, limit their potential, and deny their freedoms.

Several hundred years following the reign of King David, Jesus introduced the kingdom of God and a new accountability. When Jesus approached his disciples, walking upon the Sea of Galilee, this theophany, this appearance of God, demonstrated that Jesus, the "I am that I am," was indeed above the law, the very law of nature. Yet, as Paul affirms in his letter to the Philippians: *Although Christ existed in the form of God, Christ did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, assuming human likeness.*

The irony in our faith is that the One who is above the law was willing to be accountable to the law, even an unjust law which led to his redemptive death. There are people that we know who have persevered incredible injustices with a dignity and grace that is beyond our understanding. We join men and women across our country on this day of mourning for one of our own, Sonia Massey, a Springfield resident, who was tragically killed in her own home by an officer of the law. We understand the outcry, we weep with those who weep, and we pray for accountability.

One of Peter's and my heroes is Louie Armstrong, who persevered against unjust Jim Crow laws and legalized segregation. This gifted young boy grew up in abject poverty singing on the streets of New Orleans, collecting pennies for different improvisations of the same tunes. He would rise to become a world-renowned jazz musician and then statesman when he served as Jazz Ambassador to Africa during the fifties; however, Louie quit his post in protest of the Little Rock 9 crisis when our government and the law did not support racial justice and equality. His protest led to intense criticism and blacklisting from the white community.

Several years later during the height of rock and roll, Louie resurrected his jazz celebrity with a song of racial harmony that became an international sensation at the end of his life. This song of gratitude reflects the grace and dignity of a man who rose above unjust laws to celebrate red roses, white clouds, the dark sacred night, and **all** the colors of the rainbow. Thanks be to God, who is above the law, who holds us accountable to the law, and who created this wonderful world. Amen.