

RL Watson
SPR, 29 July 2018
“David and Bathsheba”

May the words of my mouth and the meditations
of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord,
our Rock and our Redeemer.

Amen.

David. *King* David.

[. . .]

What is it to be a *king*?

To stand and stroll the lofty heights, thinking lofty
thoughts . . .

[. . .]

Lofty thoughts like: “What is this? Ah! How can I
take it?”

[. . .]

“David sent messengers to get her, and she came
to him.” David was king.

+Never mind that he never asked her if she’d like
to go to see the king. Never mind that “we’re going
to see the king” meant “the king is going to have
sex with you now.” Never mind that she was
married to someone else. Consent was not on the
table. The king’s messengers were coming. David
was king, and the king would have his way.

[. . .]

The rape of Bathsheba was not enough for David.

He was king after all. And kings are exceptionally
good at acting behind the scenes to cover their
wickednesses. So when Bathsheba sent word to

the palace that she was pregnant, King David
thought first to cover it up. And a cover up was the
only option in King David’s mind – never a
confession, never an admission of his own
culpability – no. Uriah, poor faithful Uriah—loyal to
the crown in battle and loyal to his community in
his choice not to receive any favors while the ark of
the Lord had no temple—poor loving Uriah had to
die to keep the king’s awful secret.

And so, David takes Uriah’s life and settles in
comfortably into Uriah’s role as husband to
Bathsheba, who of course, is “very beautiful.”
David takes Uriah’s place. Subsumes it.

From all this we learn, of course, what it is to be a
king.

To *see*, and from seeing, *take*.

I began to think about this unquestioned taking. In
particular, in a kind of aftermath to the sermon I
preached MLK Sunday, I began to think about the
taking of space, and the process of dramatic
change we are undergoing in our neighborhood.

As Hyde Park, Woodlawn, and eastern parts of
Englewood undergo their regentrification—
accompanied by a reversal of the infamous so-
called “white flight” of the middle of the last
century—we have had a chance to see a (re)taking
of space up close. In the moments, and they are
swift, when populations heretofore segregated
from one another draw near, there are great
opportunities.

Perhaps when David, desirous of a new territory,
drew near to Bathsheba and Uriah, there was an
opportunity for the building of a dynamic coalition
between those who had been exalted by society
and those who have been left low. Uriah was not
only in service to David, a mighty warrior in the
king’s army, he was also a Hittite, among the tribes
named in God’s promise to Moses in Exodus 3. In
short, these were the shortly to be conquered,
colonized, and controlled by the nation, though, we
are told that even in the time of King Solomon, not
all of the children of these nations could be “utterly

destroyed.” (1Kgs 9:20-21) (And thank God for that!)

I wonder what weight Uriah’s ethnicity and socioeconomic status, and by association Bathsheba’s, had in David’s decision to take Bathsheba for himself. He did check first to make sure who it was he would be offending, after all. And the swiftness with which David’s schemes turn deadly lays bare the expendability and killability of Uriah’s body. We have seen, in our time, how quickly the encounter with an “Other,” an “outsider,” can turn bloody, and how little there seems any one can do to bring about justice in the aftermath. For who can punish a king?

But perhaps I am reading too closely through the conflicts of my own context, our own time?

[. . .]

I live in Woodlawn, and have begun to see the first signs of the changes to our neighborhood over the past couple years. As though overnight, the racial and socioeconomic makeup of my block underwent a drastic shift. The black and brown children that I was accustomed to seeing playing in the alley behind my building were joined by a sudden number of white children, the sons and daughters of our new neighbors who had moved in recently.

I thought immediately of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s vision:

“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream ... I have a dream that

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<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKEwjGg5Kl0cDcAhUCOawKHTyA6UQqUMwAHoECAUQBQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fthegrio.com%2F2018%2F07%2F25%2Fdollar-store-manager-calls-police-on-black-woman-for-using-too-many->

one day in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, one day right in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.”

And I thought of the racial climate of this nation, and of the example of its current high king, and thought that perhaps here before my eyes was the ironic, unintended gift of gentrification: a chance for proximity. A chance to be near enough to each other to join hands as sisters and brothers and set the example. To withhold the natural outcome of our lower desires to take another’s place, and instead learn to share place in peace and knowledge of one another.

This is the opportunity of the palace rooftop.

Filled with such lofty thoughts I looked out on the children and noticed that they were not playing with one another. Rather, I saw them separate themselves, reading the mistrustful notes in their parents’ faces—each set of parents for reasons their own. I watched them turn away from one another, walking loudly—willing into being an obliviousness that made me sad.

There are many stories of failed attempts at interactions when we come in contact with those whom society has taught us ought to be placed below us. Stories of women having the police called on them for using too many coupons in a store. Stories of 8-year-old girls having the cops called on them for selling water. Too many stories of police being used to enforce the taking of place. Much like David’s messengers.¹

[coupons%2F&usg=AOvVaw11pG6-G4dpcRzQ2yE05D5A](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKEwjGg5Kl0cDcAhUCOawKHTyA6UQqUMwAHoECAUQBQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fthegrio.com%2F2018%2F07%2F25%2Fdollar-store-manager-calls-police-on-black-woman-for-using-too-many-)

<http://abc7chicago.com/society/video-woman-calling-cops-on-8-year-old-for-selling-water-goes-viral/3650124/>

Police are some of the problem, but they need to be called. And called they are. And at a significantly higher rate in gentrifying communities according to the *Washington Post*, which ran a piece collecting Reddit posts by officers complaining about racist calls to the police, including calls about “someone asking the cops to investigate a middle-aged black man fishing in his own community. Another was [asked to respond](#) to a report of two Middle Eastern guys sitting in the same car. Another [laments](#) that “we frequently get calls about black men and woman and kids, yes [expletive] kids, walking. Like WWB [walking while black] was actually a crime and not a Twitter joke.” The stories pile on. A white security officer tells of the year he and his black wife lived in an apartment complex. “She got cops called a total of 9 times in the year we lived there I got zero,” [he says](#). A retired cop [recalls the time](#) a “lady called scared to death because some black guy was sitting in his truck across from her house” -- it was the water meter reader.”²

These are small matters. Trivial matters.

And they make up the quotidian fabric that is so revealing of the ways that our society offers and gives power. Power which is marked by its ability to avoid the personal encounter with a neighbor.

There are offers of earthly kingship and queenship everywhere.

And offers to kingship come daily—anytime you find yourself in an encounter where societal power is mismatched in your favor, there is an opportunity for earthly kingship. In the grocery store, at the DMV, in the church, at school, in the office, in the field, at the park, on the stoop, on the court, in the alley, . . . it is in these everyday interactions that the privilege of earthly kingship is seen.

[. . .]

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<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/05/06/these-cops-are-tired-of-white-people-getting->

I’ve been making associations about kingship and encounter, and you may be wondering, But David was not only an earthly king! He was anointed by God!

You’re right.

King David was the chosen king. He was the one about whom God said to Samuel, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” (1 Sam 16:12) David was called to a higher kingship than simply an earthly one. His covenant was with the Most High, who promised King David:

“¹⁶Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me^[b]; your throne will be established forever.” (2 Sam 7)

And that throne that was to be established forever? It was to be filled by Jesus, the King of Kings, Lord of Lords. And therein lies our hope.

The Bible speaks to us of a royal kinship:

Romans 8:29 “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”

Mark 3:34 “Then [Jesus] looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”

Hebrew 2:11 “Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.”

There is a holy kingship to which we have been called: “Whosoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” And what is God’s will?

[freaked-out-by-their-black-neighbors/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.bf6efcdc2b87](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/05/06/these-cops-are-tired-of-white-people-getting-freaked-out-by-their-black-neighbors/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.bf6efcdc2b87)

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’^{[f] 31} The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^[g] There is no commandment greater than these.”

Love your neighbor as yourself.

This is the mark of the kingdom. And in this kingdom, we are all royal.

Had David loved Uriah and Bathsheba as he loved himself, the story of David and Bathsheba would have gone very differently. Perhaps an offer of curtains for Bathsheba’s bathroom would have been in order.

In order to subscribe to the higher, holy kinship, we must love our neighbors. And love demands encounter. It demands that we see each other as brothers and sisters. It demands that we reach out for one another, and teach our children to do the same, welcoming the change that can come as a result. It is not an easy process, this loving, reaching out, but it is divine.

May God grant us the courage to reach out to our neighbors in love.

And to the Almighty God—who has been generous enough,
curious enough, and loving enough to make us
God’s own children, Lord Jesus Christ’s brothers
and sisters—
be all praise and honor and glory forever and ever.

Amen.