

*We Need Uriah*

He was a modestly dressed pastor. I confess initially I assumed he was the leader of maybe a small church or maybe an associate. I confess my assumptions and my prejudgments. His English was rough as sand paper and even his name came out in a strange way. The gentleman's kindness and compassion were hospitable to his English-speaking colleagues and myself as he humbly chuckled, "You can call me Angel." All the white people knew this was not his correct name. It was to help us and meet us at our abilities. Again his compassion, hospitality, and kindness made us at ease and by the week's end we, or at least I, embraced Angel as a dear companion in life's mysteriously, miraculous journey.

I made assumptions about this gentleman that were quickly shattered. The leader of the conference called Angel out and spoke of how the host organization was working with him to provide grants and financial support for growth of Spanish speaking ministries. No, Angel, the Mexican immigrant who made it to America via Canada was not serving a community of his own people, migrants and non-English speakers, on some border town or migrant farm community. Angel was serving a predominantly white Dutch community in the Midwest a stone's throw from Canada not the Spanish speaking world. Angel, donning jeans and a plain golf shirt, was the nonchalant leader of a multilingual Christian revival. He was, in a limited sense, Uriah without, God hear our prayer, the tragic ending. He was, I and many others pray, the redeemed path God had planned for Uriah.

Today's reading is an overwhelming mess of disaster. One Old Testament scholar, Dr. Brent Strawn, refers to this story as Bathsheba-gate, noting its dizzying nature of political scandal and injustice. The hero, the giant slayer king whose star still marks the sign of God's nation, commits murder, lies, covets another's wife, and commits adultery all within less than a biblical chapter. It's a story that reads more like a National Enquirer article than a tale to bring us closer to understanding God. It's horrifying. I pondered as I read the passage, "Should we warn parents and excuse the children?"

Thank God, there is more to the story. Immediately following Uriah's death, Nathan the prophet condemns David's behavior and the remaining years of the hero's reign are defined with familial sexual violence, more murder, the violent death of sons, unethical back door dealings by none other than Bathsheba, and a revolt led by another of his own sons. His final heir Solomon leads his own life that would make Bill Clinton and Donald Trump look like prudes. It seems, at least from a human standpoint, a start to justice. Still, we are left pondering what to do in light of such a tragic tale. What does God and our ancient siblings in faith want us to take away?

We need to care for one another especially our Uriah's. The foundational lesson is God cares as much about how we worship and honor God as the Divine cares about how we treat one another. These are inseparable. It is impossible to honor God if we fail to treat everyone as an equal. Scripture makes clear that God's command to worship and love is the ultimate equalizer. It was expected of both the prophetically chosen King and war hero as it was the foreign, non-citizen unworthy of temple worship, Uriah. It is clear who failed and who succeeded. The story reminds us human power often dictates traumatically that the righteous, the Uriah's, do not

receive a just earthly reward. Like Nathan, the prophet, it is our calling and faith obligation to find Uriah, learn from Uriah, and when needed support and protect Uriah.

Our church has an extensive history of such action. Our first long-term pastor, Charles Mason, took a sabbatical. When he did our church called his wife to lead the community in his absence. This empowerment of female-authorized ministry happened while the country struggled with giving women the right to vote. Today many mainline Christian congregations are challenged to affirm female ministry, and yet we did. Our church history is defined with a long standing interracial worship empowering and celebrating African-Americans in our community. The high point being our annual Black History worship service. Recently, we joined Lutherans and Episcopalians in worship gracefully and awkwardly celebrating our union in God despite our obvious differences. We have done these because we are unable to worship God without being in deep loving relationship with others.

I am unsure who our Uriah is now? Yes, it could be Spanish speaking immigrants who look and talk unlike any other we know. What I have found over and over again, what my colleague Angel reminded me, is we share the same faith, challenges, and deep yearning to serve God and all God's children. Uriah comes to us as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and queer. We have heard the tales of how our teenage LGBTQ members, especially ones in traditional Christian homes, are bullied, rejected, and treated more like Uriah in the story than a child of God. Welcoming and building relationship with these communities, our others, is never easy.

My relationship with Angel started rough and rocky. I never claim, especially when I get excited, to speak well. Angel and I sat across from one another, him speaking heavy accented English I had to take long pauses to understand, and me speaking like I had rocks in my mouth, having to restate and clarify every awkward word. Five days later, with faith, patience, and compassion, Angel and I were talking like friends who had been together a life time. As we renew and reinvigorate our call to serve our siblings of every race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, language, and human expression let us move with God's equalizing love. Let us always remember we need Uriah, we need the outsider, the Angel to show us the way of God's life.