Nathan said to David, You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master’s house, and your master’s wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

Leading up to this conversation between the prophet Nathan and David:

- David is appointed King of Israel even though he is not of the royal lineage, and is lifted as a man after God’s very own heart.
- For reasons unknown, while his army is off embroiled in battle, David stays in Jerusalem.
- One day while David is walking on his patio he sees a beautiful woman bathing next door.
- Deciding he must know who this woman is, he calls for her and has an affair with her. (Some readers, including myself, might say that is a generous way of explaining his exploits).
- Nonetheless, Bathsheba sends word that she is pregnant. As her husband is a general in David’s army and at war, the baby can be Uriah’s but is in fact David’s child.
- David devises a scheme to bring Uriah back from battle so that he might lay with his wife and thus cover David’s sin.
- The problem is, Uriah is one of the most faithful and loyal of servants and refuses to lay with his wife while his troops are still fighting.
- Realizing his half-baked plan wasn’t going to work, David writes a letter to one of the other leaders, and sends it back with Uriah to the frontlines.
- The letter instructed that Uriah himself be pushed to the front lines while the others draw back.
- The troops do as the king has instructed, Uriah is killed by the Ammonites, and David takes Bathsheba as his wife.

A soap opera of Biblical proportions!

I am intrigued with the cultural phenomenon of lifting certain individuals up and placing them on almost god-like pedestals – enamored by their fame or money or good looks or talent. What bothers me however, is how completely engrossed we have become as a society in celebrating the downfall of the very super-human heroes and icons we ourselves create. We love it – I might even dare say we have become in many ways addicted to this cycle:

- We get caught up in the frenzied worship of an individual as we watch them ascend to the top of their game.
Then something goes terribly wrong – there is some sort of scandal: sex, drugs, money, corruption, unchecked mental illness, violence, you name it. And everyone gives a collective gasp, acts as if they are totally stunned by the person’s humanity, and then we turn up our noses telling ourselves that WE would NEVER be involved in such matters.

It’s a really horrible cycle, right? And I will be the first to admit my participation in the sin of this crazy-making behavior.

How about – “I did not have sexual relations with that woman.” I’ll admit I couldn’t stop watching the unraveling of President Bill Clinton’s affair with Monica Lewinsky and his ultimate impeachment. Or more recently on the other side of the aisle – Bridgegate and NJ governor Chris Christie’s fall from grace!

In the sports arena I am guilty as charged for both seriously admiring and seriously admonishing folks like Michael Vick, Lance Armstrong, Tiger Woods, and Michael Phelps.

How about superstars like teen sensation Justin Bieber or Miley Cyrus or Britney Spears back in the day. Within hours she went from being on everybody’s A-list to having a public meltdown including wrecking cars, shaving off her long golden locks, losing custody of her children and being ordered into psychiatric custody.

Or what about those in the religious realm – now here my friends is where it gets good! Anyone remember Ted Haggart (founder of New Life Church in Colorado Springs) – a staunch anti-gay pastor who was then found to have had a 3 year relationship with a male prostitute? Or how about Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker…who can forget that tearful confusion? Or even our own Jeramiah Wright? UCC pastor out of Chicago whose sermonic excerpts enflamed and enraged many, ultimately leading President Barack Obama and wife Michelle to terminate their membership at Trinity UCC.

In fact just yesterday I found myself standing in the grocery store line, completely consumed by the headlines splashed upon the colorful magazine covers which surrounded me. One was about a starlet climbing her way up the pedestal – another about one man’s exploits and his subsequent fall from grace. Our crazy cultural obsession, crystal clear, right there between the milk and the veggies.

And yet when David vehemently condemns the rich man who stole and killed the poor man’s only lamb…what is it that Nathan said to David?

**You are that man!**

In the same way, I wonder if one of the reasons we are so obsessed with the rise and fall of those in the public eye, is that by being able to point out, name, and define another’s brokenness, another’s sin, we don’t have to look at our own. By contently concentrating on the speck in our neighbor’s eye we don’t have to deal with removing the log from our own. And yet Nathan said: **You are that man, I am that woman!**
A couple of weeks ago I spent time at both Duncaster and McAuley (over-55 communities in the Hartford area) – singing and praying and reading the Word of God with AHCC members and friends who live there. We read together this passage from 2 Samuel and talked about this story. One gentleman at McAuley, boldly proclaimed, “This passage isn’t about sex, it’s about David’s abuse of power and about ALL of us knowing when we have enough, it’s about being satisfied with what we have!”

And that might just be it! You see, I believe implicit in Nathan’s statement: “If everything the Lord had given to you were too little, God would have given you much more.” – and then his question: “Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in God’s sight?” is this issue of David’s egregious abuse of power and his insatiable need for more.

- Abuse of power = he was the king and Bathsheba was one of his subjects.
- Greed = he had everything he needed and yet he didn’t stop until he had that which wasn’t his for the taking.

And we look at David and we cast our judgment and we breathe a sigh of relief for that isn’t you or me.

Or is it? You see, I suspect that when we free this text up from the elements of sex and murder – this story becomes one that is way more familiar. I suspect that when we get past the salaciousness of this Biblical soap opera – we understand we too have a role in this narrative. I suspect that when we dare to explore the depths of the text and the depth of our own lives, we understand how quickly and easily we can become David!

For who among us has not abused our power or used our privilege for personal gain at one time or another? It happens in big ways for sure, but it also happens in a million different small ways. As human beings I believe it’s our legacy in some ways – racism, sexism, homophobia, being in relationship with those who have disabilities, ignorance around the issues of mental illness, lack of real compassion for the least of God’s children. The list could go on and on – sometimes we are complicit in word or deed, at other times our abuse of power and privilege comes because of what we do not say or do.

Or who among us does not struggle with understanding when enough is enough? Frankly, I think this might honestly be one of the great sins of our time. Why just the other night I was watching TV before bed and I realized that every one of the commercials, during a particular segment, was created to tap into our mentality of scarcity – we don’t have enough…or we simply aren’t good enough.

- You need a better car – one that really defines who you are.
- You need a better body – try this diet, take this pill, undergo this procedure.
- Even your children should be brighter…buy this product to make that happen.

There’s never enough, and so we chase the illusions of needing more, having more, being better!

And God said to David – “You have sinned against me and against my children, therefore trouble will indeed rise up for you (consequences of your own actions), however know that your sin has been forgiven for I am a God of love, forgiveness, and grace.
In confirmation class here at AHCC, we talk about the theological notion of grace. Developmentally young people reside in that place where everything is black and white – right or wrong, and so grace, definitely a grey area, is a difficult concept for many 8th graders to wrap their brains around (or at least the notion of giving grace – receiving is a bit easier to understand). Grace = that gift of forgiveness which is given not based on one’s merit or worth. Rather a gift that is given even when (especially when) it is not deserved.

It’s hard…

However, ultimately the Good News of our faith is that we are children of a God who abounds in love and forgiveness and grace. The message Jesus himself came to deliver is that there is no sin too deep nor too wide that God cannot overcome it.

- Jesus said, and continues to say: “You are enough…stop chasing the illusions.”
- Jesus taught and continues to teach us that it is not about power, rather: “The meek shall inherit the earth.”
- Jesus proclaimed and continues to proclaim that it is not about material wealth: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, rather, store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

You see, this very day we are reminded that…
You are that Man!
You are that Woman!
We are the children of God!

And therefore, not one us can ever fall from grace, rather we fall into it! Amen.