

2 Samuel 11:27b – 12:7

“TPOGN”

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The movie “Finding Forrester” (2000) focuses on a relationship between Jamal Wallace, a young African-American youth (played by Rob Brown) and a reclusive writer, William Forrester (played by Sean Connery). The premise of the movie centers on this young man as he attends a prestigious prep school in Manhattan. It is described this way in the movie’s plot summary, “Jamal is an inner-city kid from the Bronx who has an aptness at basketball and a genius at writing. While always a C student, Jamal comes to the attention of a prestigious New York prep school when he scores highly on his standardized tests. While Jamal is given a heavy load at his new school, both he and the school know that the real reason they took him on is for his prowess on the court.”

Befriended by a fellow student and helped along by a new friendship found in Pulitzer prize winning writer William Forrester, Jamal pursues his dreams both on and off the court while overcoming obstacles placed in his path. The friendship between Wallace & Forrester leads to a successful outcome for both men in this drama. Wallace overcomes his reclusiveness, takes a look at his past and his future; and Jamal overcomes the racial prejudices surrounding him and is opened up to pursue his true dream – writing.

There is a scene in the movie when Jamal is beginning to stroke the keys of a typewriter – he is in a sense beginning to find his voice – and as he does so, Wallace walks out of the back room – peers around the corner – and exclaims, “Punch the keys!” Then as his words are heeded, he proclaims affirmation by exclaiming, “Yeesss!” Then he adds the pinnacle of affirmation, “You’re the man now dawg!”

“You’re the man now dawg!” – YTMND.

These are encouraging words.

These are words that help another to know he is on the right path.

These are or can be words which in a sense help another to find the courage to say and do what need to be said and done.

There is another who heard these words – though not in the same way as Jamal Wallace in Finding Forrester – his name is King David.

David gets a visit from Nathan, the prophet.

The last time Nathan appeared in 2 Samuel was back in chapter 7, where he announced the oracle of God’s promise to David.

This time his presence is for a quite different purpose.

You may recall in this story of King David that back in chapter eleven (2 Samuel 11:4), David “sent” messengers in order to “take” that which was not his to take.

Now, one might say, that the LORD has “sent” a messenger in Nathan to “speak” that which must be said.

Nathan is sent to confront King David and speak of the repercussions to the King’s actions, because “the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.” (2 Samuel 11:27b)

King David had thought the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah to be finished, however the LORD was not finished with it.

Maybe it's like Steven Covey puts it, "Often, people want to excuse themselves out of situations they have lived themselves into." (*My paraphrase – any error is mine.*)

*Life would be a whole lot easier if people could get past my mistakes as easily as I do*, is how some view their interactions with the world at large. Life, however, doesn't always work that way – to a large degree that's probably a good thing.

So, Nathan approaches the matter of King David's actions – albeit indirectly – through a case study on injustice.

Nathan's story has best been understood as a parable.

We must keep in mind that parables operate out of a tension between the expected and the actual events. Actual events usually reverse the expectations of the hearer and as such make the intended point by the recital of the parable.

Parables turn one's world upside-down and inside-out.

Nathan's parable presents King David with a tale of contrasts.

There's a rich man and a poor man. The rich man has large flocks and herds. The poor man has nothing but a single ewe lamb. A lamb which is this poor man's prized possession – this lamb was like a member of his family.

Then a guest comes to stay with the rich man and he is reluctant to take a lamb from his own flock to feed this guest. The parable turns suddenly and without explanation, the rich man takes the poor man's beloved lamb and feeds it to his guest.

Leaving the reader shocked at such a heartless act.

It might be because what is described here is disguised to the rich man's guest as hospitality – crass injustice masquerading as graciousness – now that's eye-opening.

And the King responds.

King David swears by the life of the LORD that any man who would do such a thing is *ben-maewet* – literally, a "son of death" – and he pronounces "the man who has done this deserves to die..." (2 Samuel 12:5)

King David gives his thought on the legal remedy for such a situation by declaring a fourfold restitution.

His sense of offense is made clear in his words regarding this man's action, "because he did this thing and because he had no pity." (2 Samuel 12:6b)

King David is shocked and angry by the arbitrary action of the rich man.

He, however, does not yet realize the story is about someone he knows very well. Someone he sees every day.

"It is," as Walter Brueggemann states, "permissible to talk about speaking truth to power, but if truth is to have a chance with power, it must be done with some subtlety."

Well, the time for subtlety is over, and Nathan pronounces the dramatic end in the story and the moment of recognition for King David arrives, when Nathan exclaims in 2 Samuel 12:7, "You are the man!"

King David is the one who had much and took the possession of one who had little.

King David is the one who is the exploiter and perpetrator of the injustice.

Can you imagine how Nathan must have felt before this conversation?

Don't get the story wrong – Nathan had a good message to get across.

In God's eyes, the powerless are as valued as the powerful.

In God's eyes, exploitation of the powerless is evil.

In God's eyes, the achievements of the powerful will mean nothing if they are bought at the price of exploiting the weak and the vulnerable.

Now, while Nathan had a good message, it still must have been unnerving for him – the queasy, nauseous feeling in his stomach – the antacids he must have consumed leading up to that moment.

This, to some degree, is the tension that the prophet and any prophetic community for that matter lives with – how to speak the truth in the presence of power.

For certain, it takes much prayer, much preparation and much wisdom.

It's dangerous. It's risky. It's courageous. It takes courage to be one who encourages change.

And that's a good place to start – with the courage to be an encourager.

The root of the word "courage" I'm told comes from the French word "cur" for heart.

The prefix "en" translates as "to cause to be in."

To be an encourager is one who builds up the heart.

To discourage is to hold the heart down.

To encourage is to lift the heart up.

We would all do well to foster the gift of encouragement in our lives.

In such moments we will develop the heart.

In such moments we will find the courage to face life with heart.

In such moments we will find the courage to live this life before us.

In such moments we will find the courage – to live in such a way that we will know or at the very least believe that in life and in death – we belong – heart and soul to God.

How will we be people who build up the hearts of those around us – from the other members of this worshipping community – to the people we encounter every day.

How will we be a people who speak truth to power?

How will we follow God's lead in being a prophetic voice in our community?

How will we be TPOGN – The People of God Now?

Let's find out ... together!

Amen & Amen.