

Ordinary 18B (2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a)

## **In this week's reading, Bathsheba, the woman David drew dripping out of her bath and into his story, is not named.**

by [Teri McDowell Ott](#) in the [July 22, 2015](#) issue

She woke me up at 2 a.m. First as a pain in my lower back. Then as a hunch, which led me stumbling through the dark to my desk. I flipped on the light and scanned through the verses, noting all the references to Bathsheba: the wife of Uriah (11:26), one little ewe lamb (12:3), his wife (12:9). Yes, I was right: in this week's reading, Bathsheba, the woman David drew dripping out of her bath and into his story, is not named.

I'd been searching for a way into this text. I focused on Nathan's skill in truth telling. When have I told the truth in a way that could be heard? When have I received truth well? Reading beyond the text, I questioned David's confession. Does he really repent? Does he change anything after Nathan confronts him? And I commiserated with God's frustration. Does God not warn the people about all a king will take from them, like a rich man taking a poor man's lamb? But none of these themes had made me jump out of bed. I grabbed my pen and wrote furiously about Bathsheba, the woman who had awakened me from a deep sleep.

When morning arrived, my notes seemed chaotic and disjointed. Clearly, in the moonlit glow I had lost my mind; the text wasn't really about Bathsheba. So I set it aside and moved on with my day.

A huge book fair awaited me that morning, tables filled with literary magazines, writing program brochures, and lists of publishers. There were people to talk to, lectures to attend, books to buy, and free swag. I could've spent days there, but my hunger for lunch eventually led me toward the door.

Before I found my way out, someone called my name. "Teri!" I turned to a woman gesturing me over to her table in a far corner. I happily obliged, appreciating how

she had used my name tag to get my attention.

Her table, however, had no T-shirts, coffee mugs, or bourbon shots to give away—just a poster taped to a blue tablecloth printed with the words “Afghan Women’s Writing Project.” The woman behind the table was passionate about her subject, using her hands to emphasize how the Afghani women had no way to express themselves, no way to be heard. As she spoke, a postcard on the table caught my attention and locked my eyes to the gaze of a brown-skinned woman. She seemed to want something from me. Her eyes held a story waiting to be told. Suddenly, I recalled my 2 a.m. insight.

Although I admired Bathsheba’s tenacity, I again pushed her out of my mind. It wasn’t her time. The text has other concerns—like the foretelling of trouble that will arise from within David’s house. More wives will be taken. A daughter will be raped. Anger, betrayal, and vengeance will be kindled. It is a passage full of heat.

A couple weeks later, back on the campus where I serve as chaplain, I was asked to sit in on a women’s studies class in which a drama troupe was performing. The troupe acted out stories “gifted” to them by victims of gender violence. The classroom was full of energy and chatter when I first arrived, but as the performance began the space grew quiet and tense. A lone student rose and stepped to the front. When she began, her voice was determined, but as she spoke her shoulders hunched forward as if to form a protective shell.

The relationship began as a fairy tale, she told us, but her boyfriend quickly became possessive, dictating rules, dress, and behavior. Frightened and trapped, she didn’t know what to do, so she tried to get her boyfriend to break up with her by violating some of his rules—which worked for a while. Until he broke into her apartment one night.

Watching this actress embody her role, I recognized how important it was that these stories be told, liberating the voices of those silenced by oppression, violence, and abuse. It hit me that Bathsheba was giving her story to me. She needed an advocate, a surrogate, a witness to bear her testimony.

Still, I was not ready. I was too busy for controversy. I was also too afraid. So I told myself again that the text isn’t about her. I kept exploring my other themes. I focused on the prophetic confrontation and the unveiling of the truth. I wrote pages upon pages until I finally mustered the courage to face my own truth: I was boring

myself, and I was doing it on purpose. I needed to give Bathsheba her chance.

So I leaned in to listen. I read between the lines. I imagined Bathsheba in King David's chambers. Here I was confronted by a woman frightened, trapped, and angry—angry at being negated and ignored. Angry at being told—by the author, by me, by you—not now, not here, hold on, wait. Here I was confronted by hard truths—hot, sweaty, uncomfortable truths—that called *me* to account. Here I was confronted by the Holy, the Holy that rips open these places of reckoning, these places of justice and acknowledgment, these places where, by the grace of God, the silenced are finally heard.

Here I was confronted, so here I confessed. “Yes, Bathsheba. I have sinned against the Lord.”