

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

July 26, 2009

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2 Samuel 11:1-15

¹In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

²It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. ³David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." ⁴So David sent messengers to fetch her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. ⁵The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

⁶So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. ⁷When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. ⁸Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. ⁹But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. ¹⁰When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house", David said to Uriah, "You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?" ¹¹Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing." ¹²Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, ¹³David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

¹⁴In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. ¹⁵In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die."

John 6:1-21

¹After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ²A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" ¹⁰Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them

to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹²When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." ¹³So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

¹⁵When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

¹⁶When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. ²⁰But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." ²¹Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going.

"Shoes & Socks Groundedness"

When was the last time you were grounded? See, I know what you are thinking. You are thinking back to those teenage years when you did some thing that you knew you should not have been doing and one of your parents punished you with that sentence: "You are grounded!"

It was a punishment. It was not a reward.

To be grounded usually meant that you were not allowed to leave the house. You had to be home and could not be out and about with your friends. The punishment was that you were not allowed to roam the neighborhood or go play basketball at your buddy's house. No. Grounded! You were stuck at home.

It almost goes without saying that being grounded was a negative and not a positive. One wanted to avoid being grounded. And rightly so—one should avoid being grounded when the purpose of being grounded is punishment. Punishment really does not work. It makes the one who is being punished resentful and usually just goes to further the divide between the one being grounded and the one doing the grounding—I suppose you could call them the groundie and the grounder.

I don't know that grounding works anymore. I always marvel at the idea of a kid who is sent to their room. And in their room is a television, a DVD player, a computer with a live internet connection, a phone-either cell or standard land line—sometimes both. It is not exactly an isolation chamber. It is not like the monk who goes to his cell in order to think about his path and journey.

Nowadays to be sent to your room is often to be sent to anywhere on the World Wide Web or any land that Play Station 2 has in store. It is not exactly roughing it.

I do not know who invented grounding. I do not even want to know. I figure that either it has its origins in the penal system or it is an outgrowth of the monastic system. In the one it is clearly about punishment, but for the other it is about grounding in a broader, more positive sense of the word.

So the monk, or student, or contemplative one was sent back to his cell in order to contemplate, it was a place of reflection and focus where discernment happened. It is my hope that is the origin of the concept of being grounded.

Indeed, it is my conviction that the concept of grounding grows out of this same dynamic. It is less about punishment and more about having the confinement of place in order to have the space to literally remember that which grounds you.

In this regard to be grounded is to remember your foundation. It is to summon a memory of who you are and why you are. Such memories should shape behavior and decision making.

While I can never remember being grounded in the traditional teenage sense of the word—and maybe I have just blocked it from my memory—I do think I have an idea of what grounded was supposed to mean for me. It would have been an opportunity to re-boot rather than getting the boot. It would have been an opportunity to remember what kind of behavior was acceptable for someone who was a member of my family of origin.

Were I to peel it back even farther I think it has something to do with literal ground. There is something about being connected to the ground. There is something about walking. That process of applying foot to the ground and then lifting the foot and placing it one after the other and then the other again. There is something that connects one to the earth in that process.

I remember Archie Bunker concerned that Mike Stivic did it wrong. He was not putting on his socks and shoes in the proper Archie Bunker order. Mike put on one sock and then a shoe and then the other sock and the other shoe. Archie told him that every body know it is a sock and a sock and then a shoe and a shoe not a sock and a shoe and then another sock and another shoe. “Even a meat head knows it is a sock and a sock then a shoe and a shoe.”

There is something about when that order is complete and we stand upon the earth. There is something about literally being grounded that helps us to know where we belong. To get in pace with our life—that is in there.

There is that old saying about walking a mile in someone else’s shoes. The idea is that until you do that you cannot really know what they

face. I think this whole notion of groundedness—which is a bit larger than merely being grounded has to do with almost walking a day in God’s shoes. What does it mean for us to put ourselves in that place? And there, what does it mean to ask ourselves those questions about the expectations of behavior there?

I think when we have that groundedness we do remember who we truly are and how we are to live. When we have that groundedness we are living with love as our primary aim and with reconciliation as the dynamic in our movement. Our purpose has more to do with building community with each other than it does with being self-focused.

To be grounded is to know and understand your purpose. I see this issue in the church all the time. For us who are in the church we tend to lose our ground when we start to think that it about the church’s survival rather than about reaching people with and for Christ. It is so easy for us even well intentioned folks to lose our way.

David lost his way. He lost his groundedness. He really messed up not only with Bathsheba, but also in sending Uriah to the front of the battle lines to be killed. He was not remembering who he was, he was focused on saving his own skin. He needed to walk a day in God’s shoes—he needed to get into his room or walk about the earth and remember who he really was and how it is that he really was supposed to behave.

I think to that is the point of these miracle stories. I do not think that they are so much about food coming out of nowhere and walking on the water—but I do think those things happened and I do believe they are wonderfully in God’s capacity too. What I think these stories are more about is our keeping our groundedness.

Here it is 5,000 people who have flocked to be with Jesus. They are literally chasing him down the street and following him out to the grassy fields. There is not enough money in the treasury to buy them all something to eat – there are so many of them. They just keep coming. They come; he gives. He gives them food, he gives them interpretation of the Scriptures, he gives them a memory of what it means to be God’s children and part of God’s family—he gives them a groundedness that they know is real and authentic and trustworthy.

And it grounds us today too—to look back and see the miracle of the loaves and the fish. It grounds us to see that miracle and also the miracle in the miracle—that those hungry crowds longing for meaning and fulfillment found it in Jesus. He is still our ground—he grounds us—he provides the groundedness we need.

So almost like walking on the earth we know the incredible truth of the story. Here they are on the sea being tossed to and fro and Jesus comes to them walking on the water. “Don’t be afraid; it is I.” They hear him. They are not afraid. They are calmed by his presence. That is the miracle of the story—yes sure, the walking on the water, but especially the fact that we can look back and see that this band of needy people were comforted and released from fear by the presence of the one who came to them in middle of their fear and terror.

That is being grounded. That kind of groundedness is the kind that tells us who we really are. It checks us into our reality and gives us the courage to help someone else find their ground.

That is the kind of being grounded that I hope others see in us so that we end where we began with someone observing in us—“You are grounded!” May we be so grounded. Amen.