Sermon on Proper 17 Year B 2021
(2 Sam 11:1-15; Ps 14; Eph 3:14-21; John 6:1-21)

Do you have a framework from which you live and move and have your being? Less poetically, how do you choose the commitments you will live by and towards? To drill a bit deeper, what is it that *motivates, pulls, or draws* you towards those commitments?

That we can ask these questions is one of the things most unique and powerful about our species. Unlike other creatures we have choices about how to live, about what makes life good or not. As far as we know other animals have some level of consciousness but live almost exclusively in reaction to their environment.

We creatively impact our environment by deciding how best to fulfill our needs and wants. How to do this well turns out to be *the human question* both in terms of our private lives and in terms of communities

The answer determines, as we’re discovering, not only our personal joy and fulfillment, but the fate of the earth itself!

Over the past several hundred years as we have, courageously we think, and as the common story goes, gradually and helpfully emancipated ourselves from framing our commitments, our motivations, away from religion and God we’ve not been as clear about what’s replaced that. But we have replaced it, with, get ready for it: Desire.

By that I don’t mean any particular desire but Desire as an organizing structure to human pursuits and societal organization. Our organizing structure has moved from Loving God to Getting What We Want.

To be fair, desire and want had been unfairly repressed for quite some time, which simply allowed them to exist in a hidden way, sometimes behind the smokescreen of God and religion.

Desire and want, on their own, certainly they are not evil; and they should always will be present; getting what we want has always been a driving force in human life both individually and societally; we wouldn’t be here from an evolutionary point of view without it.

But what happens when “Want” becomes *the* organizing principle? When it becomes “the basic commitment” of human living? Well, this is why global capitalism works so well on in our world.

Ever since Adam Smith wrote his famous *Wealth of Nations* the publication of which coincided with the birth of the United States, 1776, the so-call “law” of supply and demand has highlighted that humans desire and the more and the better, often with no regard to consequences to themselves, their communities, or environment.

Our first reading is such a modern scene: David sees a person he desires, that he wants on some visceral level and takes her.

Sorry this isn’t #MeToo moment, Bathsheba is a collaborator in this affair; she knows what time of the month it is when she bathes in full view of the King’s portico, like a good Kardashian she sees an opportunity to get what *she* wants; a legacy, a potential heir in the Royal household and she takes it, however much she may regret it, mourn Uriah, however much we might say that the King had the power in this scenario, and he did, it turns out that Bathsheba will become, in the long run, the mother of Solomon, Israel’s greatest King.

But we can dispute about that later; scholars are mixed in their reviews of Bathsheba’s actions and motives.

For my purposes, however, it is enough to know that though the society David and Bathsheba lived in was vastly different than ours, it becomes a good example of the type of collaboration between “wants/desires” that drives our decisions in modern society.

On of the more illuminating conversations I have in pre-marriage preparation is when I explain that today marriage is often seen as a contract in which each partner scratches the itches of the other (I’ve actually seen partners knowingly smile at each other at this point) and then, to their shock, explain that this isn’t actually what marriage is conceptualized as in the New Testament! This is a classic example of “wants” structuring our “commitments.”

The vision of Christian marriage which I then expound, sometimes to jaws wide-open is of a covenant in which unconditional love is offered. Yes there are deal-breakers but those aren’t pre-baked into what is vowed!

A covenant isn’t a contract but a relationship based on grace, forgiveness and learned faithfulness.

One of the symptoms of a society based on “desire/want” is that you have to constrain it because much of the time, unlike an affair in which “want” corresponds with another’s “want,” many of our desires, cancel other people’s “wants;” they take away the rights of another e.g. the virtuous Uriah the Hittite’s right to life!

And so even though we now live free from “religious motivation” which supposedly imposed a an oppressive code of morality on all of us believer and non-believer alike, now we live in a time and place in which we’ve had to proliferate laws in order to curb our desires, what those of us who some historical context in view call “the nanny state,” inane laws that take away so many of our common sense freedoms because we can no longer trust people to desire in tune with a higher principle than simply their own selfishness.

I’m not advocating a return to the past for wider society because, honestly, I don’t think it was better or worse, it was different.

What I do advocate for, as someone concerned with God’s God News is that you and I and our community learn to live from the Eucharistic Covenant in which God gives to us more than we deserve

In which we offer infinitely less than even payment, the equivalent of our five loaves and two fishes. And after such find ourselves receiving exactly what we need as well as being privilege to participate as those who give to each other from the rich store of God’s provision.

It is this covenant of God’s unconditional love to us that can cure our rapacious and damaging desire and replace it with desire in tune with God’s vision for wise choosing, wise commitments, wise stewardship of God’s gifts.

And as we do we find that we have the power to resist what we might immediately want but that will devastate ourselves and others. David and Bathsheba’s adultery led in time to the devastation of David’s house and civil war in Israel.

Whereas participating in the feeding of the five thousand led to a kind of door in which untold numbers, then and now, can participate in God’s diffuse giving.

As we participate in Christ’s covenant we discover (counter-intuitively and astonishingly) that there’s never a situation where, when we gather, there is a real shortage of what we really need. There just isn’t! Put it to the test!

This framework for our commitments gives us confidence to live, less from fear and anxiety, into a trusting confidence in God’s goodness and provision.

In some ways our second reading, a meditation on the unity of Christ’s body, is a sustained reflection on moving from living from “want” to living from the power of God who is working through all, and is in all.

Each of us having a special grace and gift to give that which, when taken together, when linked with other gifts, the diversity and harmony that is this community, feeds us, gives us what we need, even as it feeds the world.

There really is a Desire that can, over time, shape all our desiring and wanting. Indeed, without this belief and hope for all our world, then all we really do have is the law of supply and demand, then what we see is what we want and as we gain power to obtain it, the world falls to pieces around us.

But as we give our loaves and fishes around we find that we’re given something in return, something that feeds us and keeps feeding us. From there we look out on a vista of beauty that never ends, and from where we really can live and move and have our being.