Jill is in her late fifties – a spiritual seeker and deeply sensitive soul. Though she grew up in the Church, she moved away from organized religion in her twenties. At some point years ago, just beginning to discern my own call to ordained ministry, I asked her if there was anything in particular that caused her to leave Christianity. She thought about it for a bit and then told me it all went back to her Dad’s funeral. Jill’s father had been a successful businessman and a pillar of their community. He was well respected, well regarded, and, she quipped, as mean a drunk as you ever met. Growing up with an alcoholic parent was for her - as it is for pretty much everyone - a terribly disorienting experience, made all the more troubling by the willful and willing silences of all the other adults around her. When she looks back on her early years now, Jill figures anyone with eyes to see would have realized her dad had a problem; would have noticed how incensed he became after a few drinks, and must have simply turned a blind eye to the bruises and breakages she and her siblings often bore, as much a part of their everyday attire as pigtails and penny loafers. The betrayal of those silences still upsets Jill, even after decades of therapy and Alanon, but the funeral, she says, that was the worst.

Why? Because as complicated as her relationship with her Dad had been, Jill still loved him, and she was heartbroken when he died, and in those final opportunities to say goodbye, Jill felt so keenly the oppressive shame and silence of her family’s secret. All she wanted was to be able to acknowledge the fullness of who her father had been – lighthearted and listless, silly and sometimes scary, driven and dark - so that she could mourn him fully. But then the pastor stood up and waxed poetic about what a wonderful person her father had been. He recited a list of his accomplishments, his contributions to the community, celebrated his renowned wit, all of which was real and true and good, but no one said a word about the people he had hurt or the damage he had done. It was, for Jill, a massive betrayal. “No one told the truth about who he was,” she lamented, figuring, in the end, that no one really wanted to know, maybe no one cared, and that the Church wasn’t interested in her story.
I think about Jill pretty much every time I plan a funeral, wondering and worrying over how to celebrate a human life in all its vast complexity, trying my best to hold space for families to say the things they need to say, and hear the things they need to hear, while walking the delicate tightrope of various pastoral and ritual concerns. But I also think about Jill when I reflect on how we memorialize people from our wider tradition. One of the most tragic parts about Jill’s experience is that the God of the Bible, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, the God of Israel, the father of Jesus Christ, that God is \textit{extremely} concerned with the hard and heavy realities of being human, and is explicit about wanting to know the particular hurts, harms and hopes of our lives. And yet the Church, at least for Jill, was not able to model that, to really communicate to her and presumably others in her family the depth of God’s love and concern, and the depth of their love and concern.

It is particularly important for us to be mindful of our call to model and practice God’s courageous silence-shattering love today, as we reflect on our first lesson, which described the rape of Bathsheba by king David. This sordid tables comes from the Second Book of Samuel, but it could just as easily have been ripped from a New York Times headline, pulled off your Facebook feed, or found anywhere the #MeToo movement is being covered these days. It is a story about violation and exploitation, about power and privilege misused and abused. Which is to say it is a terrible story, and a hard story, and a human story, and it is still, despite these things, included in our collection of sacred stories, and appointed for us to read and hear and ponder every few years as a community. The temptation is to gloss over it, like Jill’s neighbors did with her dad’s drinking. (After all, who wouldn’t prefer right about now for me to be talking about the feeding of the 5,000 from John’s Gospel?) But the easy way is not always the faithful way.

It is springtime in Jerusalem, a beautiful time, but a bloody time: “the time when kings go out to battle,” the text says. And yet David, the beloved and triumphant King of Israel, does not go to battle, but sends an officer, Joab, to lead the army, which might give us a sense of David’s age or reputation at this point. He no longer had much to prove. He doesn’t have to go put himself on the line anymore. He had people to take care of these things. So David remains in the palace, safe and sound, while his men besiege a nearby city, and it happens one afternoon that he goes up to his roof, the highest place in the city, which gives him a great view but also a view into the homes of those around him, which is how he sees Bathsheba, the wife of one of his soldiers, taking a bath.
Despite how movies have depicted the scene in recent decades, the text does not say that Bathsheba was, herself, on a roof, or in any way intending to expose herself. We can assume she was in her home, privately tending her business and her body. David is captivated by her beauty and sends messengers to get her and bring her to him, at which point, the story simply says, he lay with her. When we consider all the dynamics at play here – David the king, Bathsheba the commoner; David the head of the army, Bathsheba’s husband a foot soldier - it is hard to imagine Bathsheba consenting in any meaningful way to this encounter. At the very least, it is hard to imagine she could have said “no.”

Time passes and Bathsheba realizes she is pregnant. When David learns of it, he sends word to Joab to send Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, home. So Uriah comes, probably awed and amazed to have the company of the King, and David urges him to go home, rest, relax, and enjoy the company of his wife. Why? You might wonder. The text isn’t explicit, but it seems safe to assume David is plotting. Bathsheba couldn’t have her husband’s child if he was away at war, but if he happened to be home for a few days in the middle of the siege of Rabbah then, when his wife started showing in the not too distant future, it would be easy enough for Uriah to count the months backward and set his mind at ease.

Only Uriah is made of stronger stuff than David expects. Instead of going home to enjoy the varied comforts of domestic life, he sleeps in the quarters of the King’s servants, and when questioned about it tells David that it wouldn’t be right for him to relax when his brothers are putting their lives on the line to defend their lands and their God. So David tries getting him drunk, hoping he’ll be more receptive to the power of persuasion, but finds himself further disappointed. And so - maybe regretfully, maybe guiltily, maybe shaking in his boots - David gives Uriah a letter for Joab, his commanding officer, and sends him back into the line of fire carrying his very own death sentence. Talk about a cover up! Harvey Weinstein himself could learn a few things.

Now this is where the reading for today stops, but it is not the end of the story. Uriah is killed in battle, as David intends, and Bathsheba is invited to join the king’s household. And David – the king, the coward - is called out by the prophet Nathan and repents of his deeds. And down the line, Bathsheba bears another child of David’s, this one named Solomon, and when David dies Solomon becomes king, and he builds the temple, and he is remembered as the wisest of men, under whom Israel flourished.
This is a story about violation and exploitation, about power and privilege misused and abused, but it is also, importantly, a story not only about David’s family but about God’s family, because Uriah and Bathsheba don’t only appear in the book of Second Samuel. They also appear in the very first chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, which begins, “An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham…” and it keeps going, all the way down the generations to Joseph, the husband of Mary, and in that long list of ancestors, Bathsheba is one of only five women mentioned. This terrible, hard, human story, is also a story about the family of Jesus, and therefore a story about our family, the human family, and it is a story we are called to tell and retell because God doesn’t want us to make the same mistake Jill’s pastor made. God doesn’t want us to pretend that David was only a great warrior and a tremendous leader, true as that may be. Instead, God wants us to tell the truth about who David was: inspiring and interesting and intelligent, but also manipulative, capricious, and brutal. God wants us to remember all of it, to know him fully, because this is part of how we know ourselves and each other more fully.

Every family has a secret - like Jill’s, like David’s, like God’s - and most have many: the constant fighting; the triangulation; the addiction; grandpa’s affairs; Aunt Lou’s vulgarity; cousin Marty’s racism; the troubles with money; the unease around Joey’s coming out. In the best of cases, there’s just some incongruity between the story we tell ourselves about ourselves and the reality of who we are together. And in the worst there’s real neglect, abuse, and violence, often unacknowledged and unnamed. And when faced with this dysfunction it is nearly everyone’s tendency to look away, to downplay, to deny. There are some things its best not to talk about, we convince ourselves. There are some things that are just too hard to say aloud. And there are some things that just feel too raw and too revealing to share. But our secrets and our silences have a way of making us sick, and all too often they become big boogeymen in the dark, our failures to speak making us think we can’t bear what needs to be said, can’t bear what was, or what still is. But our faith tells us otherwise.

What happened to Bathsheba was wrong. What David did was wrong. And thanks be to God we can say that out loud, here, together, because somehow in the telling of those hard and hurtful truths we practice telling our more particular hard and hurtful truths, those closer to home, and we open ourselves to God’s healing ever more fully. We discover those fearsome cracks in our hearts where Christ’s love shines through. And somehow, without minimizing or
pretending or hiding, we are made more whole for the speaking and sharing, the loving and bearing, that we offer and receive.

Dr. Rosenna Bakari is a scholar and social advocate who is particular interested in the cultural shifts evident in the #MeToo movement. As she reflected on this in a recent interview, I was struck by her reminder that one of the most powerful parts of this phenomenon is not the courageous and inspiring witness of those willing to speak out, though that is essential, but the importance of our collective willingness to listen. After all, she says, “what good is telling your story if there’s no one around to listen?” Part of our call as a community of faith is to hold space for hard and holy conversations, the ones that make us truly human. The Church, at its best, is one of those places we practice this kind of holy listening. And when we do, it can make us uncomfortable, but it can also change everything.

After a few decades away from the Church, my friend Jill met an Episcopalian at her job, and they became friends, and she invited her to come to a healing service, and, for her, it changed everything. It was the beginning of believing that the Church did care. That God cared. That God wanted to know her story. It was for her, as it can be for all of us, the beginning of her journey home. Amen.

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