**What drives us? August 1 2021 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a Ephesians 4:1-16**

If you have been watching the Olympics you will have been confronted by various news stories showcasing the lives of the competitors. These segments often sought to uncover what has been driving these individuals to compete at this level. There have been some highly emotional stories. There was the boxer whose boxing was deeply connected with her brother who died before she was born, but who was also a highly successful boxer. One commentator tried to console her with encouragement regarding how well she had performed, but she responded passionately, that that meant nothing to her, it was all about winning for her brother. Many things can drive our actions, some may be helpful and lifegiving others may be damaging.

Our readings today provide us with some contrasting content. As I read over them however, I was struck by a unifying theme within them. That theme of what drives us? Why do we make the choices we make? What drives our curiosity?

The story we read about David sees him confronted obtusely with his sin, by reflecting on a story, used in a sense as a parable. It highlights the motivation of the man in the parable and therefore also his own motivation. It reveals his greed and selfishness, fuelled by his lust.

We didn’t read the gospel passage from John 6 however it describes the motivation of a crowd pursuing Jesus after the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus describes their motivation in these words, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.”[[1]](#footnote-1) A little later in the passage they ask Jesus for a sign, which ‘will cause them to believe’. They appear to be driven by their basic appetites and by a desire to experience the miraculous.

However in the passage we read from Ephesians, Paul speaks about a desire to grow in knowledge and love of God and to function together well as a community. He identifies these as being appropriate, lifegiving drivers for this early church community.

As followers of Jesus, basic human drivers such as lust, greed and selfishness are not obliterated from our beings. We may have gained strength to resist these urges, but the painful public reality of Christian leaders who have become caught up in the grip of such things, is a stark reminder of how temptation remains a constant challenge.

David’s story however does not end with his failure. David recognises that his sin is not just against the people around him and the man whom he had killed, primarily his sin is against God. Nathan reminds David of God’s great generosity towards him. He reminds him that God anointed him, rescued him and abundantly blessed him. He even adds, that if that was not enough, God would have done much more for him. However David responded with lust, greed and murder. Nathan challenges him with the words *“Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight?”[[2]](#footnote-2)* He emphasises that David’s sin first and foremost is against God. When Nathan finishes speaking, David’s immediate response is, ““I have sinned against the Lord.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

The psalm for today is commonly associated with David’s repentance. He acknowledges that his sin is first and foremost against God, he says, *“Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight”* [[4]](#footnote-4)*.* He desires that God would mercifully cleanse him and transform his life. He says, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+51&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-14702b)] spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+51&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-14704c)] spirit.”[[5]](#footnote-5) He then goes on to commit himself to teach others the ways of God. He wants to use this “willing spirit” to honour God.

Samuel Terrien described this process as “the energy of God himself [which] transforms the unstable, fluctuating, self-centred” person “into a steadfast willing servant”.[[6]](#footnote-6)

David’s response is consistent with a man who recognises that he does not want to be driven by his own impulses, he wants to be motivated by God in everything.

Paul was concerned that the Christians in Ephesus would not be driven by their own impulses, or be led astray by persuasive people who were not following God. He desired that they attain a greater level of maturity in their knowledge and love of God, and he believed that this could be developed by “speaking the truth in love”. This phrase is difficult to translate from the Greek, it has been suggested that is really should be “truthing it in love”.[[7]](#footnote-7) “Truth” is being used as a verb not a noun in this sentence. He is urging them to **demonstrate truth in all they do,** in the actions and in their words they should be living examples of truth.

Absolute truth has been devalued in our age of fake news, and with the concept of “your truth” and “my truth” becoming so popular. David’s actions and words related to Uriah were designed to deceive, he was not interested in being truthful until Nathan challenged him. Paul wanted the Christians in Ephesus to realise that demonstrating truth and love through their life choices would enable them to grow and to function as an effective caring community.

He encourages them to recognise the gifts they share through the lives of one another. Prior to this passage he had encouraged them to be united as a group, to be humble, gentle and patient with one another and he urged them to lead lives which were worthy of their calling as followers of Jesus.[[8]](#footnote-8) Then he goes on to speak more specifically of four particular gifts of the Spirit that will operate in their community. The gifts of being apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists. Too often this passage has been linked to the clergy in a church, but these gifts operate far beyond ordained clergy. At various times in our lives each of us may be the one who is prompted to bring a prophetic word of challenge or encouragement to someone else. We may be the one to encourage and nurture a friend as they grapple with their faith in God, we may offer some new insight about God to a friend. We may be the one to help a friend or family member to respond to God, we may encourage and help others to use the gifts God has given to them, we may be the ones whom God sends into particular situations.

As we enter this week it may be a good time to allow God to examine our lives and help us to see circumstances in which we may need to be more driven by love and truth than we may have been in the past.

It could also be good to focus on being open to the promptings of God’s Spirit, and to the opportunities God gives us to use the gifts God promises to give to us, that together we may build up “his body” his church.

1. John 6:26 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2 Samuel 12:9 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 2 Samuel 12:13 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 2 Samuel 12:4 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Psalm 51:10-12 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Samuel. L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Towards a New Biblical Theology,* (San Francisco: Harper Row Publishers, 1978,) 176 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the letter to the Ephesians,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994) 130 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ephesians 4:1-4 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-8)