When I was a kid, I hung out with the neighborhood boys. There was only one other girl in my neighborhood, except my twin sister who at the time didn’t count, and to be frank, the boys were just more fun to be around. They did cool stuff, but to join in with this group of guys, there was, you might say, an unspoken code of ethics. You had to support each other, and above all things, you must remain loyal to each other, otherwise, you were ousted from hanging out with them.

Being loyal didn’t mean you had to agree with each other, but everyone knew that you didn’t ‘rat out’ on your friends either if they were caught doing something wrong. You might tell them to their face that they were real losers, but when the parents came seeking answers, they were met with a unified look of, “we don’t know anything.”

Our 2 Samuel reading this morning is framed with a code of ethics, called the Ten Commandments, and later reframed by the Deuteronomy writer into an ‘obedience-blessing or a ‘disobedience-curse’ outcome, and while it might seem like this is no big deal for us as Christians, if you want to understand the prophets, and if you want to understand the narrative about David, then it is important to understand the mindset of a Hebrew man in the 10th century before Christ.

David would have understood this code of ethics which meant you would succeed with blessing if you obeyed the commands of Yahweh, but if you failed to do so, you would experience retribution. Parker Palmer, a Quaker author writes, “the shape of our knowledge becomes the shape of our living.” King David, along with the prophet, Samuel, were shaped by their current understanding on how to live out the Ten Commandments in their daily living. As I review this story of David, Uriah, and Samuel, please keep in mind this idea that these 3 men were shaped by the Ten Commandments, where two men obey them, and one man, David, chooses to ignore them. Let me review the story in 2 Samuel.

Just about every king seems to have had a prophet to help keep him honest. Saul had Samuel, Ahab had Elijah, Hezekiah had Isaiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah seem to have shared Jeremiah, and so on. King David was the one who had Nathan. There is nothing of Nathan's life in writing so it's impossible to grade him on literary skill, but when it comes to the ability to be a thorn in the king's flesh, he gets a straight A. The best example is, of course, the most famous.

David had successfully gotten rid of Uriah the Hittite by assigning him to frontline duty, where he was soon picked off by enemy snipers. After a suitable period of mourning, David then proceeds to marry Uriah's gorgeous young widow, Bathsheba. The honeymoon had hardly started rolling before Nathan came around to describe a hardship case he thought David might want to do something about.

There were these two men, Nathan said, one of them a big-time rancher with flocks and herds of just about everything that has four legs and a tail and the other man was the owner of just one lamb. He had the lamb living at home with himself and the family, and he got to the point where he even let it lap milk out of his own bowl and sleep at the foot of his bed. Then one day the rancher had a friend drop in unexpectedly for a meal and, instead of taking something out of his own overstuffed freezer, he got somebody to go over and command that the poor man kill his lamb, which he and his friend consumed with a garnish of roast potatoes and new peas.

When Nathan finished, David hit the roof. He said anybody who'd pull a stunt like that ought to be taken out and shot. At the very least he ought to be made to give back four times what the lamb was worth. And who was the greedy, thieving man anyway, he wanted to know. “Take a look in the mirror the next time you’re near one,” Nathan said. “You are the man!” It was only the opening thrust. By the time Nathan was finished with David, it was all David could do just to pick up the receiver and tell room service to get a stiff drink up to the bridal suite. The glory of being a war hero and the King of Israel had gone to David’s head, where he presumed no one would question or challenge his decisions. How wrong he was about Nathan.

Nathan, was not only a prophet, he was a wisdom bearer; a person who was not afraid to confront wrong with right, and did this by helping the person see himself through the eyes of another person, in this case, through the eyes of a parable. Nathan pulled David back to his roots as a shepherd to remind him God was God, and David was a mere man, and David would suffer the consequence of his lies, he would feel the guilt of stealing a man’s wife and committing adultery, and his choice to murder would have dire consequences. David’s life going forth, would be cursed, as any good Hebrew knew of the Ten Commandments.

David had become full of himself, thinking that there was no one who could or would challenge his decisions. Nathan reminds David that God is over all things. Jesus does a similar thing when the crowds follow him to Capernaum. The people are looking to become like Jesus. The crowd asks Jesus, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” We want to be like you, and like Moses in the wilderness, Jesus responds by saying, “it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it’s my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.”

This small crowd following Jesus is not that much different than King David. They want the ability to exercise divine power, and they missed the whole point on what Jesus was trying to say, “that Jesus was the bread, and they could quench their ambition for power by believing in him.” Jesus was not proclaiming a kingdom of power, but a kingdom of love and acceptance, not an easy sell in any generation.

We are all like David and the crowd of people who follow Jesus. We desire recognition for the things we accomplish. We want what we want, and if our desires hurt the lives of other people, then so be it. You see, individualism, the need to protect your own rights over the rights of another person, carry a hidden danger, the danger of becoming narcissistic, where others must mirror our own ideas, or copy your religion, or make one race better than another race. Let me bring it down to our little world in The Dalles.

Do you have a Nathan in your life, who cares for you enough to keep you honest, authentic, and loving? A Nathan who shares their wisdom by listening to your story, and bringing a different viewpoint forward. David Brooks shares his wisdom. He says,

We live in an ideological age, which reduces people to

Public categories – red/blue, black/white, republication/

democrat, conservative/liberal, yet, we all have the choice

to see people as persons, not types.

I know from listening to other people as they lie on their deathbed that none of these labels we use to set us apart from other people matter. What matters, are the relationships we share in making each person stronger, and better, and more loving. The apostle Paul understood the importance of speaking the truth in love,

“We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown

about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love,

we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together

by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building

itself up in love.”

What code of ethics do you live by? Self or the other? Amen.