

Preached by Daniel M. Lindner
Whitewater, WI)

Sermon for February 12 (St. John in

Text: 2 Samuel 11:1-17, 26-27 Theme: In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war...

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus', our Lord,

We live in a climate where seasons often dictate activities. From yard work to our entertainment schedule. We get the mower ready, we prepare the soil, we harvest, we winterize the house, we get the snowblower ready. Or on the entertainment side, fall and winter is football season. Then we have Spring training and baseball season. We know how seasons can impact our physical and emotional well-being. Maybe you know the experience found at the end of summer where there's either dread or excitement because a new school year is about to start. Routines can be good. We can have the doldrums of winter that can often lead to an edginess spring delays its arrival. There's spring fever. As much as we can love what summer brings, there can come a time where parents long for the routine for their children of the School Year.

As you heard the Old Testament reading, many of you were reminded of an account you've heard when you were in Sunday School/at a Christian Day School. This serves as our sermon text today. One thing that we don't always catch when we hear this lesson for the first time as little children or even later in life because the sins that David commits speaks so intensely to our own hearts is how this transition in David's kingship begins. Prior to this, we have multiple things going on that would establish David as king. Saul and his family line are no longer in contention. Enemies of the Israelites are being subdued. And now we find King David in his palace. We notice the opening words of this chapter. IN THE SPRING AT THE TIME WHEN KINGS GO TO WAR. As we dive into this as these opening words serve as our sermon theme there are three things that will be highlighted in the sermon connected to this phrase. 1. The Concept. 2. The Consequences. And 3. The Cross.

1. The Concept

In the introduction, you hopefully identified seasons to activities. It was no different during King David's time. There were certain activities that went on. One of them was when kings would go to war in the springtime. The explanations I've read were due to longer days and better weather. Some other historical clues included spring being a time of spring harvest so that fields would have food to help feed armies (and armies would have something to pillage), you can think of the Greek (Roman) god Mars – where we get March from – the god of war and agriculture. I also read that winter was for negotiating and spring was for action. IN THE SPRING AT THE TIME WHEN KINGS GO TO WAR. It's a concept and there is still evidence of that today. (Read about how daylight savings time was also called "war time" – longer days for production of war material and better conditions for launching offensives.) As you look back at the reading, what did you notice about David? When kings would go to war, "David remained in Jerusalem." He sent his commander Joab out to do the duties that belonged to the king. See how that "concept" helps us identify the concept or expectation that David should have been too busy to be

gazing off of his palace balcony with fewer men (soldiers in town). IN THE SPRING AT THE TIME WHEN KINGS GO TO WAR identifies where King David's problems start. He wasn't doing what he should have been. Fast forward a bit or at least a snippet to modern situations. When I served college students as a campus pastor, I usually would have some sort of Bible Study/devotion on this section prior to Spring Break. Why? Well, if you think of the concept connected to "Spring Break" you often have images of sun, beer suds, and a party scene. While most students didn't look forward to that because they had to work, some needed that warning of remember who they were when it was spring. While most of us are at an age where we aren't heading to the Florida seashore or beaches of Cancun, we know where our idleness (not being faithful stewards of our vocations). Maybe the concept is, "when I go to the salon/barber shop or have my coffee, that's when the harmful gossip flows from my tongue and to my ears" or when it is time for bed, my social media posts and reading infuse anger/jealousy in my heart. Jumping back to this with concept with David, it's that David was not engaged in the activities that he as a king should have been. What did that lead to? That's where we look at the second part of our alliteration – the consequences.

2. The Consequences

As King David remained in Jerusalem and wasn't engaged in the activity that he should have been, boredom hits. He wanders on his balcony and there and behold he notices a woman bathing whose beauty captures his eye and leads to lust in his heart. What does he do next? He inquires of who this woman is. When he should have been off to war, his idleness leaves room for trouble. Yet he still has some warnings before continuing on this sinful path. His neglect of his duty soon turns into the neglect of hearing a warning. When he asks his servant who this woman is, the servant clearly identifies her not just by name but also by her vocation. **"She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite."** Did you catch her identity? This is the WIFE of Uriah the Hittite. This was not David's wife. This was not a single girl without a husband. She was spoken for. She was gifted to another man. Yet David, ignores that helpful piece of information. Again, he does what he is not supposed to be doing. Objectifying a woman who was both a daughter and wife, he takes her into his palace and engages in sexual intercourse with her. IN THE SPRING AT THE TIME WHEN KINGS GO OFF TO WAR...David remained in Jerusalem and now takes another man's wife and ignores God's command regarding marriage. Yet there are more consequences. Because King David ignored the concept, a conception happened. Bathsheba becomes pregnant. What happens then? Does David take ownership of his sin and cry for God's mercy? No, he must cover this up. Instead of using the information given him as a warning, he uses the information to summon this soldier home. King David's strategy is to have a soldier come home under the guise that he is doing something beneficial for the army with his report that would in turn lead to a reunification between husband and wife and the baby news would give the assumption that it belonged to this soldier instead of being the result of an affair. But no such luck as Uriah chose to sleep at the gate instead of in his home with his wife. That strategy failed so let's try the next phase. Let's get Uriah drunk and rest on his laurels so that he goes

home, sleeps with his wife, and no one would know the wiser of who the father of this child is. But no! That did not work for King David. So what next? It's time to get Uriah out of the way and take this fallen soldier's wife into his home as a way to take care of those who died for their country. David sends Uriah with the order for his own death to Joab. The order is to have the army, with Uriah in front lines, engage in fierce fighting and withdraw from this valiant soldier so he dies on the front line. That order was followed. And then what happens. It allows David to bring Bathsheba into his own home and make it look as if the King cared for his country's veterans who had fallen in battle. David falls for his own propaganda all the way through. Denial of sin, excusing sin, covering sin, leads to more and more consequences and other sins. Not only for David, but count the number of individuals he led into sin – Bathsheba, his servants, Uriah, Joab, the soldiers with Uriah. And at the end for those in Israel, the story would sound nice for those in the kingdom, "our king takes care of the families of those fight for him and die". As we looked at the first line, did you catch the last line of the chapter? **But the thing David had done displeased the LORD.**

Now is good time for a pause. Maybe as you heard the retelling of this story, your mind wandered to some of your own sins. We fall for our own propaganda too. In the Gospel this morning, Jesus highlights murder/hatred/anger/spiteful words, lust, divorce, breaking of promises/failure to keep them. How is it we view our sins? Some prime examples in our midst include that while we may say sex outside of marriage is wrong, yet we make excuses. If we say something, they'll get angry. We as a church need to let things play out. I love this person. We love each other more than some married people we know. We ignore the vocations gives us. At a time when the father should say something...or the mother should say something. At a time when excuses for neglecting gladly hearing God's Word and obeying it should be addressed, we make excuses. We turn the pastor into the bad person because he didn't do things in the way that we think will win them over or painted their sin as ugly instead of focusing on the many beautiful things they do. Instead of forgiving and having a home where husband and wife run to their Savior daily, we can get really good at making a tally list of the sins that would justify our innocence and may even end in divorce because we ignored the servants/messages of our Savior. Think of the homes where we've led a child or a spouse into sin because "it's just one Sunday" or "this basketball, hockey, or baseball tournament" is so important. Sometimes we wonder why young adults don't have a high regard for regular worship in God's house. These are all things we hate hearing. Hearing about my sins and my falling for my own propaganda doesn't make me feel good. Hearing how failures, individually and collectively piles shame and guilt upon shoulders. What are we ever to do! As the laws cuts our own hearts and we see our dire situation, we have one who in the SPRING TIME WENT TO WAR. Where is that concept so adequately represented and carried out? It's the Cross!

3. The Cross

We know how there is more to story as chapter 12 explains to us. The Lord in his mercy and grace sent a prophet to King David by the name of Nathan. This prophet would confront David with a story. David, the mastermind who thought he could manipulate the

situation with Uriah and Bathsheba, easily fell for the story that set King David up for his own judgment. If you recall, Nathan told the story of a poor man with a little lamb that he treated as a daughter who was slaughtered by a rich man. King David was outraged and gave an outcry for both justice and judgment. Nathan then turns the story on King David and says, “You are that man!” And yet God in his mercy and grace did not send David and Bathsheba off to hell but instead let God’s prophet speak comfort to them and tell them that the Lord has taken away his sin and that he will not die. For God, the promise of Savior would need to be fulfilled. The Lord had our salvation in mind as he dealt with this king who fell into sin. We benefit from God’s sending of Nathan to King David. There would be another King one, WHO IN THE SPRING WHEN KINGS GO OFF TO WAR would indeed go out and do battle on behalf of sinful mankind. That person of course is Jesus, a descendent of both David and Bathsheba.

When would that happen? Think of what we have coming. Yes, it’s winter but spring is around the corner. We have those special celebrations of when our King went off to war on our behalf to battle sin, death, and the devil. Oh how perfectly Jesus carried out his purpose, his vocation. Soon, the Sunday is coming where you hear of our Savior’s Transfiguration. Soon, you’ll hear how Jesus went off to war against the devil in the desert¹. Soon! You’ll trace the steps of his last week through the events of Holy Week in Lenten Services and the that day when our King was given a crown of thorns. And there it is! There is where you see your King going off to war! There you see him suffering for the lies, the laziness, the falling for our own propaganda, the lust, the adultery, the gossip, the broken marriages, the sins we’ve led others into, the hateful thoughts, words and actions. There on that cross our Savior goes to war and defeat sin and the devil. There Jesus’ pays for those sins so that we too can hear the assurance that both King David and Bathsheba had that they would not die nor be condemned to hell but instead forgiven. That message is for you and me too. Yes, the cuts of God’s law are sharp and to the heart – and needed! But our King went to war so that those cuts could be bandaged and healed. God gives us the gospel! It’s what brings the comfort and healing. IN THE SPRINGTIME WHEN KINGS GO OFF TO WAR, our Savior went to war for us on the Cross and then he defeated that last enemy – death on Easter morning – that celebration in the Spring. He rose triumphantly from the grave assuring us that death will not hold us – something King David knew too (think of this child/son who died – David would go to him).

As I told you, I would usually use this section of Scripture for college students prior to their Spring Break. It’s fitting that it comes as Lent soon approaches for us too. You could say that the list of sins if we pair both 2 Samuel 11 and then Jesus’ words from the Sermon on the Mount that we heard today (Matthew 5:21-37) are just as real for us. It’s a good reminder to look at the vocations that God gives us and ask his help to carry them out in a way that we can resist temptation on our heavenward march following our King who went to the Cross and conquered the grave. It’s also good for us as we see those around hurting and in need of hearing about their Lord and Savior. Amen.

¹ 1st Sunday in Lent