

**Sermon Title: “Here Am I, Let It Be”**

(Preached by Rev. Paul Wu, at St Giles Presbyterian Church,  
December 20, 2020, 4th Sunday of Advent)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you.  
O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

For the past year and a half, the city of Montreal and the borough of Cote-des-Neiges / NDG have been gripped with the political drama of Valerie Plante vs Sue Montgomery. It is a knock-down, drag-out fight that has been playing out in the court and media. It pitted the borough mayor Montgomery, alone against the entire administration of the city mayor Plante. The issue centres around the refusal by Montgomery to fire her chief of staff, Annalisa Harris, without due process, over an allegation of harassment of other civil servants.

In a sweeping judgement issued last week, Quebec Superior Court Justice Bernard Synnott came down clearly on the side of Montgomery. It would appear Montgomery stood her ground while protecting Harris, a capable young woman who was caught up against what seems to be a ‘good old boys club’. But if you were to think that the ruling should conclude this twisted affair, think again.

Montgomery subsequently sent an email to the borough’s other elected officials, along with the judgement, calling on them to apologize to Harris. “(I) hope you are all ashamed of yourselves for the way you turned your backs on her,” Montgomery wrote. “Please let me know how you like your crow cooked. It will be served with pleasure.” Yikes! forcing others to eat crow, has that ever work in politics? or in any other aspect of life?

To eat crow, according to urban dictionary .com, implies at its mildest an unpleasant action since the flesh of the crow is believed to be unpalatable. (I don’t know anyone who has ever eaten a crow, nor could I imagine anyone willing to give it a try.) The expression denotes the anguish of humiliation at having to admit to wrongdoing or fallibility, usually in the wake of hubristic actions or words. Perhaps a more gentler expression would be ‘to eat a humble pie’.

Thinking back to my own life, particular in pastoral ministry, I certainly had my own share of ‘eating humble pies’. I suspect if we were to have an open forum, we would all have endless fun, sharing stories of eating humble pies. In the Scriptural readings this week, for the 4th Sunday of Advent, both Prophet Nathan and the young maiden Mary also ate their share of humble pie.

Nathan was a court prophet, in the time of King David and his son Solomon. He had a long and productive career, as a prophet of the Lord, as a chronicler, and may

have even contributed to court music. Nathan is most well-known in the Bible as the one who stood up to David, in the king's sordid affair with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. But at this point in the passage of 2 Samuel 7, Nathan had only begun his prophetic ministry.

A question was put to him by David, well, implied at the very least, *"See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent."* (v.2) *Nathan replied to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you."* (v.3)

Several things that were happening during that exchange: first, David was exerting control — dominion over his nascent kingdom. David had recently won a number of significant victories over the Philistines, and gained land — coastal territories that were allocated to tribes of Israel, and was only beginning to exert fuller control.

Second, The ark of the covenant had recently been transported safely to Jerusalem. The ark, which contained actual stone tablets of the ten commandments, had always been central to the religious life of Israel. It was lost in the hubris of Saul, the former and disgraced king, when he sent it ahead of the actual army, during a key battle against the Philistines, thinking it would secure a much needed victory. It was not to be, so the lost ark languished at various locals for a number of years. Bringing the ark to Jerusalem in an exuberant and public ceremony, as recorded in the previous chapter of 2 Samuel 6, highlighted the genius of David, as he consolidated his political and religious dominion.

So let me be clear about David's intention, to build a house of cedar for the ark of God, was not a simple gesture out of the goodness of heart, it was meant to cement his legacy, his kingdom, to build the 'dynasty' of David by building a 'house' for God. It was control, pure and simple!

Let me also be clear when David consulted Prophet Nathan, sort of check one's intention against God's will, Nathan failed to do his job. You see, when such an important decision with wide-ranging applications and long-lasting implications was put before the prophet of the Lord, Nathan was supposed to inquire the will of the Lord. Prophets were, strictly speaking, acting as mouthpiece for the Lord. They were prohibited from making any pronouncement if it did not originate from God. Punishment for false prophets was quite severe — to be stoned to death.

It was not clear if Nathan fully understood David's implied request, but he certainly fail to properly consult. By deferring to the king's will, and pronouncing 'the Lord is with you', the prophet failed to do the one job he was ordained to do. So it should not come as a surprise when the word of the Lord came to Nathan that same night, most likely in a dream, force-feeding the prophet a bit of crow and lots of humble pies.

*"Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?'"* A rhetorical question as it turns out. God then

proceeded to outline all the things that God had done and will continue to do for David. Instead of entertaining David building a 'house' for God, God turned the table by declaring (in verse 11) that, *'the Lord himself will establish a house for you'*. In verse 12, God continues, *"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."*

What God was saying to David, was not a simple case of foretelling his future. It was in fact a covenantal promise. The offspring of David that God was alluding to was not Solomon. It was in fact pointing to Jesus, the Christ, the decedent of David, the Son of God. Imagine when Nathan woke from that dream, sweat soaking, heart pounding, realizing the big mistake he made, having to swallow that crow, that humble pie. Prophet Nathan then dutifully reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.

Fast forward by about a thousand years, which is like a day for the Lord, the covenantal promise was fulfilled in the good news that Angel Gabriel revealed to Mary, in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 1. *"The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

Though still a virgin, promised to Joseph yet unwed, Mary was perplexed, not by the prospect of God fulfilling his covenantal promise to David through a lowly servant girl, but by the mechanic of miraculous conception, Mary said to the angel, *"How can this be, since I am a virgin?"* Then Gabriel assured her, *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God."*.....For nothing will be impossible with God!

Credit to Mary, she quickly pivoted, humble pie eaten, doubt cast aside, then Mary said, *"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."*...Here am I, let it be!

Eating humble pies may have connected the story of Nathan and Mary, but there is also something else at work...I am referring to the covenantal promise of God. A promise once given, stands the test of time through generations, through millenniums, until it is finally fulfilled. What turned Nathan and Mary was not the realization of their own mistakes, their own shortsightedness. What really turned both the prophet and the virgin was the recognition of the covenantal love of the Lord.

'*Hesed*', in the Hebrew language, is most often translated in the Bible as love; sometimes as kindness. I think the KJV of the Bible translates it as 'lovingkindness'. '*Hesed*' is most often associated with God's love for God's people.

It is not a sentimental kind of love, for that kind of love is always shifting, one puff and it's gone with the wind. It is not a romantic kind of love, for that kind of love burns brightest in the beginning and fades quickly over time. It is not even the parental kind of love. Many mistakenly assume that parental love is pure and unconditional, but it is neither. The field of psychotherapy traces its origin to dealing with patients who suffer the lack of parental love, or were affected most severely by the perversion of such love.

No, '*Hesed*' as love is something entirely different. It hinges on the idea of covenantal promise, much like one makes in a marital vow. But where humans are fallible, promises often broken, the covenantal love of God is infallible, promise always kept, never broken. This love of God started with the covenant with Abraham, continued and renewed through David, is now fulfilled and manifested in Jesus.

This divine drama is the greatest love story ever. When we the community of faith lights the candle of love in the 4th Sunday of Advent, we acknowledge, just like Nathan and Mary, our participation in this divine love story - as both actors and recipients. Here we are! Let it be! We may sometimes eat our share of humble pies, we may sometimes stray from the righteous path, but we are assured of God's mercy and lovingkindness. For indeed, *the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; new every morning great is thy faithfulness, O Lord, great is thy faithfulness.* (Lamentation 3:22-23)

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**