

Trinity Church (ELCA)

Stephens City, Virginia

Sunday's Sermon

June 12, 2016

The Rev. Mr. Cameron P. Keyser

Pentecost 4-C

Once upon a time – in a far-off distant land...or, maybe *not* so far off, there lived a politician. Not the average run-of-the-mill lyin', cheatin, connivin' politician – but a really good guy who everybody loved. He was liked so much that he ran for election on both parties, and was, well, what you could almost say – 'divinely appointed.'

Nobody disliked this guy. He couldn't of bought a bad editorial in the paper even if he tried to. He never ran any of those always dubious and half-truth attack ads – and nobody even ran them against him either. He really was the kind of guy you'd love to call your son-in-law: smart, honest, just, kind, friendly...

Now, I know *this* part's gonna' be really hard for you to believe but – trust me: he had *no* personal or political "agenda" of any kind - except to try and do the best for his people, and, yes, for God. He was, truly, a statesman. But, he was also human.

His career actually began when he was a little kid on the day when – after years and years of giving all the kids in his particular school massive amounts of trouble, our hero – let's call him 'Maurice,' OK? – the day Maurice, our hero, knocked down the biggest, meanest, tallest and, yeah: dumbest bully on the playground. Single-handedly. With one punch.

Word about his bravery and newly- demonstrated street fighting skills spread rapidly far and wide. If Steve Harvey's "*Little Big Shots*" TV show had been around, this kid would've been on there every week. He was handsome: clear complexion, ruddy cheeks, sculptured body – he worked outside a lot... Maurice had it all: everything you'd ever want in a political leader or...a son-in-law.

But, he was human. very human. And, there's a story about that side of him that, well, not many people seem to know. Not sure why: maybe his handlers have managed to keep it quiet – or he's never been 'vetted' aggressively enough. But – you remember that before I became a pastor – I was press secretary to 2 candidates for governor....and, ahhh, well: let's just say I *still* "know a lot of people...who know a lot of people, who know –

well, yeah: a lot of people..." You get my drift...So, you can pretty well take the crux of this story to the bank.

It's pretty intriguing – so out of context of who this guy was that it'd make for some pretty impressive headlines...*if* anybody ever found out. So, let's just keep it between you and me, OK?

It all started one late afternoon in the spring. Now Maurice was supposed to have been away – out of town - reviewing his troops who'd been engaged in a battle for nigh-on to 8 years now. Springtime's when all the political leaders go out to check on their men and women in uniform, pop-in to the USO, pat a few backs, shake a lot of hands...that's what he was *supposed* to be doing. But, he wasn't. He was tired...a little out-of-kilter. so, he cancelled the secret service detail, had them bring the limo back from the airport, told the cook to go ahead and fix dinner - that he'd be up on the piazza: you know – that flat rooftop kind of thing a lot of rich people have on their houses... getting some fresh air.

That was Maurice's *first* bad decision of the day – but, it wouldn't be his last. In fact, if he hadn't been shirking part of his responsibility; if he'd been where he was *supposed* to be, *doing* what he was *supposed* to be doing – like the responsible statesman that he was – there would be no story, and I'd be sittin' down right about now. But, he wasn't. And, while he was up on the piazza, let's just say Maurice got a lot more than just fresh air:

Seems he was glancing around when he spied something he just wasn't anticipating – and, was utterly incapable of handling. Seems his neighbor: this gorgeous, knock down drag out model – she must've been a Playboy Bunny – was catching a few rays in the "all-together" – or better: in the "none-together," and Maurice's "bottom-of-the-barrel" human instincts took over.

"Who *is* this babe?," he lustily asked an aide who'd just come up to deliver his gin-and-tonic. "I mean, Wheeeewwww!!!"

'Oh, you don't know her?," the aide replied. "That's Bonnie. Quite a looker, huh? But, she's married.

In fact, she's married to one of our commanders in the Army: Captain Hite. he's over with the 1st Division – the ones you were *supposed* to be visiting today..."

Maurice seemed not to have even heard. "Bring her to me!," he ordered the aide.

Now, I don't wanna' get too detailed here – I know there are children in the audience – let's just say a few weeks later, Maurice found out he was gonna' be a daddy.

Well, you can imagine: that went over like a lead balloon with Maurice. "I can't be publicly pinned with *that* rap," he rationalized. "It'd ruin everything I've accomplished. My career would flush down the toilet!"

And then, surprisingly, his long-suppressed human instincts took over - instincts which didn't float too much higher in his barrel of human instincts than did the first one...and he began to plot how to spin this potentially devastating scandal.

"Got it!," he thought to himself as he called an aide with the snap of his fingers. "Bring Captain Hite to me. Tell him I have a special assignment for him."

When a stunned Captain Hite arrived at the official residence, he was amazed at how welcoming our hero – and his Commander-In-Chief – was to him: "How're things going out there on the front, Captain?," Maurice asked while pouring them both a martini. "And, how's your family...your wife?: I believe her name is...Bonnie?..."

Idle, meaningless chatter...Maurice really didn't pay any attention...

'Take a leave, buddy!," Maurice suddenly interjected. "Go home – take a break. Be with your wife...relax..."

But, Cpt. Hite didn't do *any* of those. Instead, he slept outside in the courtyard – on the ground with the rest of Maurice's servants. When Maurice found out, he was enraged.

'Why?," he asked the good Captain.

"Well, my *men* are still in battle. Surely you wouldn't expect me to go to my house, and take a bath, eat and to drink and lie with my wife when *they're* still at war..."

"Humm," Maurice stroked his beard, this was going to be more difficult than he'd originally thought.

"How about a drink, Captain? I know you could use it after all that fighting..." And, how about another...and another...until Cpt. Hite got drunk...

You see what Maurice was trying to pull here, don't you?: He thought it'd be nicer if Capt. *Hite* became a daddy instead of himself.

But, the good captain still didn't go home that night.

In kicks Maurice's very human 'Plan B:," a letter to his Commanding General, which he gave to Cpt. Hite to deliver.

'Set Cpt. Hite in the forefront of the hardest fighting," Maurice's letter read. "Then have all the troops desert him so that...well, you know – he gets struck down..."

And it came to be.

A few months later, Maurice and Bonnie got together again – only this time he married her...and then the baby came. A boy.

All this quite human weaving and dodging and calculating and plotting and murdering started to really get under the skin of party leaders – not to mention God – who, after all, had pulled a few strings himself to get Maurice appointed in the first place. To put it mildly, God was divinely hacked – and devised a plan of his own: he summoned Maurice's best friend, Nathan – and gave him a few 'words' to share with Maurice:

"Buddy," Nathan began, "I've got something I've got to tell you - something I found out down at the stock sale last Monday. Paul Anderson – he's there every Monday – told me about these 2 guys he knows: one rich; the other – well, not so much. The rich man had tons of flocks and herds; but the poor guy had nothing – zero, zilch, nadda - except one little lamb who'd grown up with his children. She ate with them from the family's often nearly empty table, drank out of the kids' 'sippie' cups, and spent the night on the foot of their bed. This little lamb was like a daughter to him."

Nathan paused to make sure Maurice was listening...

"Well, one day - a traveler showed up at the rich man's door, and – as you know, it's our custom to fix our guests dinner."

Maurice nodded and smiled, imagining his own storybook ending to Nathan's tale...

"*But*," Nathan said, "the rich man wasn't about to take a sheep from his own flock– he hadn't gotten rich by cooking away his lively-hood for every Tom, Dick and Harry that showed up on his porch, you know..."

Maurice chuckled.

Nathan took a deep breath and quickly said, *so/he/took/the/poor man's/lamb/instead!*"

Maurice was stunned. He jumped up: face as red as a beet, jugular veins popping out of his neck... "The man who did this deserves to die!," Maurice screamed. "I'll make him give the poor man four lambs - because he had no pity.'

“Well, this is it,” Nathan thought to no one but himself in his head. “Here we go...”

His eyebrows narrowed as he squinted at Maurice...his breathing now labored, the inside of his mouth: as dry as the desert at noon...But, he looked Maurice square in the eyes, shoulder to shoulder, nose to nose: ‘*You...my dear friend...are* that man. God *got* you to where you are today. He hand-picked you...rescued you when you were beating up that bully on the playground – you don’t really think you could have taken him by yourself, do you?...

God took you away from your menial tasks out there in the fields...gave you this nation and these people - and if *that* hadn’t been enough, would have given even *more*. Why, then, have you done what is evil in my sight?,” asks the Lord.

The message was clear – and Maurice ‘got it:’ ‘I have sinned against the Lord,” he cried and broke down in tears.

“For every action,” Nathan continued, quoting Newton’s 3rd Law of Physics: “there is an equal and opposite reaction. And because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, your child shall die.’

And, that, too, soon came to pass - but not before Nathan assured him that – because of his confession – his sin had been ‘put away’ to be remembered no more.

And, so the story ends. *Almost* - because, like with every story of God: Maurice and Nathan’s, Jim and

Joan’s, Sally and Fred’s...Cam’s...Pauline’s... Ricky’s... Carolyn’s: there always comes a Word of Grace: if we have ears to hear, and eyes to see.

To paraphrase Elizabeth Barrett Browning: “How can I *offend* you, Lord? Let me count the ways:” seems to be what’s floating around in today’s Old Testament story: disregarding God’s desire; lust; adultery; scheming and conniving; insincerity; injustice - that would be David’s – I mean *Maurice’s*, what? - I’ve lost count: 5th? 8th? millionth bad and deliberate human decision?

But, that’s how sin works: one leads to another and then a bigger, and then even bigger – all in an effort to cover up the first. Sin captures more than just the sinner – paralyzing our common sense. Sin comes – to *all* of us: even the heroes of the faith. And, it always comes at great cost.

But, the price of God’s Grace and Forgiveness – in spite of our sinful, disobedient, all-too- human foibles – has already been paid for us – on the cross, in the empty tomb and in that sprinkle of water like on Shawn’s head just a few minutes ago.

If God could forgive the sins of the human King David, don’t you think he can – and *will* – forgive you, too?

How can you say you have nothing to be grateful for?...

Source Consulted: Jack Wellman, Mulvane Brethren Church, Mulvane Kansas