

A wealthy old lady decides to go on a photo safari in Africa, taking her faithful aged poodle named Cuddles, along for the company.

One day the poodle starts chasing butterflies and before long, cuddles discovers that she's lost. Wandering about, she notices a leopard heading rapidly in her direction with the intention of having lunch. The old poodle thinks, "Oh, oh! I'm in trouble now!" Noticing some bones on the ground close by, she immediately settles down to chew on the bones with her back to the approaching cat. Just as the leopard is about to leap, the old poodle exclaims loudly, "Boy, that was one delicious leopard! I wonder if there are any more around here?"

Hearing this, the young leopard halts his in mid-attack, a look of terror comes over him and he slinks away into the trees. "Whew!", says the leopard, "That was close! That old poodle nearly had me!"

Meanwhile, a monkey who had been watching the whole scene from a nearby tree, figures he can get something out of this. So off he goes, but the old poodle sees him heading after the leopard with great speed, and figures that something must be up. The monkey catches up with the leopard to tell him what he saw.

The young leopard is furious at being made a fool of and says, "Here, monkey, hop on my back and watch what I do to that dog!" Now, the old poodle sees the leopard coming with the monkey on his back and thinks, "What am I going to do now?", but instead of running, the dog sits down with her back to her attackers, pretending she hasn't seen them yet, and just when they get close enough to hear, the old poodle says: "Where's that monkey? I sent him off an hour ago to bring me another leopard!"

I love that story. The poodle, Cuddles found a way to think fast and secure her safety and her future. In our scripture for today, we meet Bathsheba, a woman of strength, who is also able to think fast and secure her future.

Before I get into the story, let me remind you where we are. We are in the midst of a sermon series called Models of Faith: Celebrating 50 years of Women in Ministry in the United Methodist Church. We are celebrating the full Ordination rights of women in ministry in the United Methodist Church. And we are looking at women from the Bible who are Models of faith, as we seek to live faithfully in our world.

Today, we are talking about Bathsheba. Bathsheba is one of King David's wives. Together, they had Solomon.

David had many children. But he had promised that Solomon would one day be king in his place. I am not sure if he told all of his children that Solomon would one day be king. But like most children, even if he had told them, David's children didn't do a good job of listening to him anyway. Even though David was a great King, he wasn't too good of a father.

At the very end of David's life one of his sons, Adonijah, the eldest decided that he was going to be King. And he set himself up as King over Israel. This causes a panic for Bathsheba, for Solomon, and for anyone who cared about the unity of Israel, because it meant that there would probably be a civil war over who was going to be the next King.

Bathsheba was worried. Because if Adonijah remained King, he would probably kill his rivals and their families, which means Solomon and Bathsheba's future was looking pretty grim.

Now, having said all of that, Bathsheba's position wasn't one of strength or power, because she just couldn't walk up to the King to speak. Depending on the King's mood, even that could get her in trouble. If you get the idea that women in that culture were to be seen and not heard, you would be correct. If you get the idea that women in that culture had few, if any rights, you would be correct.

But if you are a woman, even in this culture, you probably know better than me what it is like to be denied rights or denied equality. I understand that as a white male, I have enjoyed privileges many of you sitting here who are female have not enjoyed. And I want to say this is wrong. We are celebrating 50 years of women in Ordained Ministry in the United Methodist Church. But let's not forget the struggles that women in ministry, in our society, and in our world have had.

If we can remember women like Susan B. Anthony and Sojourner Truth, a black traveling preacher woman. These 19th century religious women not only sought the abolition of slavery, but sought the right of women to vote.

Because of women like that, women like my wife and our five daughters are born into a world where we expect blacks and whites to be treated equally, where we expect women and men to be treated equally, and where we expect the call of God to be honored equally. What a privilege to be born into a world like that.

You see, not every woman is born into a world like that. A world where she can envision living free and unfettered, doing anything she puts her mind to. Even today, the status and role of women around the globe is shameful.

There is a growth of *human trafficking in sexual slavery*, impacting women and children the most. *Refugee women*, who have escaped war, genocide, ethnic cleansing are at terrible risk of hunger, impoverishment, illness and death. *Women in countries at war* all too often are subjected to the atrocity of rape. *Immigrant women* are growing in number.

Then there are the *abused women*, victims of violence. *Single mothers* are often victims of poverty. *Gay women and men* are victims

of discrimination. *Muslim women*, who in so many countries lack control over their own lives. And women of color in all walks of life are up against phenomenal sexism. While white women still earn less than men for the same jobs (women earn 9% less than men) women of color earn even less than white women.

Many women, too many women, are born into a world in which the expression of their God-given dignity and calling is off limits and that is wrong. That is why, we are here during this Advent season, remember and celebrating this accomplishment from fifty years ago. That is why we are lifting up women from the bible as models of faith. We are celebrating what has happened. Even while we realize there is more work to be done.

Bathsheba was able to go into the King and tell him the truth, and urge him to act because she gathered up the strength God had given her. And that God given strength helped her overcome her fears.

If you are here today and find yourself facing something fearful, I urge you to turn to God, gather up the strength God offers, and face your future, knowing you are not alone. Together, we can learn from women like Bathsheba. Together, with the witness of Bathsheba, we can help our world be better for all the women of this world.

Amen