

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the sinless one, Jesus Christ our Savior and our Lord, amen.

No one likes to have their errors, their sins, pointed out to them, but sometimes it's a necessary thing. We all need someone in our lives to act like Nathan did to King David. The Bible doesn't tell us what was going through Nathan's mind while he was telling his hypothetical story about the poor man and his little baby lamb. Speaking truth to power is never easy and never done without a certain bit of fear and trepidation. My guess is Nathan's hands were shaking, his palms were probably sweating, and his voice was quivering. Yet his conversation with King David produced the result God already knew was in David's heart.

Let's take a moment to review the story. David was the youngest son of Jesse from Bethlehem. He was picked over all the other sons of Jesse because the Bible says God doesn't look on the outer appearance, but on what is in the heart. God must have seen something in David everyone else missed. David is still widely known as the greatest King in the history of Israel, yet he committed some of the most despicable crimes recorded in the Old Testament and the Old Testament is full of despicable behavior... The lectionary reading for today skipped over 20 verses in the middle of chapter 12. If all you knew was what we heard this morning you might think poor Uriah the Hittite had died of some disease or as a legitimate war hero. Our text says it was the springtime of the year. That's

the time when Kings led their troops out to battle. Did you notice that King David decided to stay home in Jerusalem instead of leading his troops against the dreaded Ammonites? While he was AWOL, he committed Adultery and according to some commentaries, likely raped Bathsheba. After this one night stand left Bathsheba pregnant, David ordered his commanders to put Uriah front and center in the fiercest part of the battle. After he was in place, David ordered all the troops around Uriah to retreat, leaving poor Uriah standing alone against the entire army of the Ammonites. David effectively ordered Uriah's murder. By my count that's at least 5 broken commandments all wrapped up in a neat little package. It's hard to find a more despicable set of behaviors, even by today's standards. Yet the Bible never says God made a mistake in choosing David, nor does the Bible record God being sorry for allowing this murdering rapist to remain King.

Before we get too critical of David or for that matter critical of God for allowing such bad behavior, let's look at our own lives and behavior just a little. If we're honest with ourselves breaking 4 or 5 commandments isn't all that hard. Most of us do that before breakfast and we call that a Tuesday... Even if we use the Readers Digest version of the Commandments Jesus gave when asked by a Lawyer about the greatest commands we fare no better. Jesus said the greatest Commandment is to love the Lord your God with all you heart, mind, soul, and might. He went on to say a second command is as important as the first, to love

your neighbor as yourself. In David's case and your case and mine, we break those two every day, most of us multiple times every day.

David didn't start out thinking he was going to break almost every rule of civilized society. He started out by neglecting his most important job as King, to lead his army in battle. He might have had other pressing business, but I suspect he was simply taking time to do some "self-care"... While he was taking care of whatever it was that he was doing, he noticed a strikingly beautiful woman bathing on the roof of her home. Now, if you love the Lord God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, you might notice such a sight, but instead of dwelling on it or acting on it you thank God for creating such beauty in the world, just like you might notice a beautiful butterfly or a lovely flower. When your mind is on God you might even pray for the health and happiness of the woman and her husband. Instead, David coveted Uriah's wife and then committed sexual assault or at the very least adultery with her. It all stemmed from David's not loving God with his whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, or his neighbor as himself.

At this point David was as far away from God as he had ever been in his life. He didn't even recognize how far he had strayed from God. It took a prophet named Nathan to point out his sin. This is where David responded quite differently from most of the rest of humanity. Once aware of the wrong he had committed, David spent the rest of his life repenting. You can't read the story of David and

Bathsheba without understanding how much David lamented the sins he had done. That's why our lectionary included the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm along with this story. Scholars are still debating how many and which Psalms were actually written by David and which were written by someone else and simply attributed to him. In my Bible, there's a historical note at the beginning of Psalm 51 that says, "To the leader. A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." David either wrote the Psalm or it was written by someone else who was very familiar with the story of David and Bathsheba and knew of David's secret sins.

Most people don't react the way David did when confronted by sin. We tend to become defensive. We tend to deny our responsibility. We tend to become angry and lash out at the one who shows us what we've done. At least I do... Just look at the way the religious leaders responded to Jesus when he pointed out their failures in leading the people of Israel. Not only did they refuse to repent, they believed they were already righteous in God's eyes. They didn't just get angry at Jesus, they nailed him to a cross, just for pointing out their sin.

As time went by, and before Nathan entered the scene, David must have felt relieved he had gotten away with such heinous crimes. He seemed to have everyone fooled. Then along came Nathan. In verse 27 it says the thing David had done displeased the Lord. God wasn't asleep at the wheel when David decided to

run amuck. God hadn't forgotten his servant David, it was David who forgot God... In one of his books, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was hanged at the age of 39 on April 9, 1945 by the Nazi SS wrote: "The Devil does not fill us with hatred for God, only forgetfulness of God." The Devil makes covert war on God's people. We don't even notice some of the Devil's insidious ways. "Just don't talk about religion in public", the Devil says... "Keep Church and State separate", the Devil says... "Don't share your faith or you might be laughed at", the Devil says... "You can create our own man-made cultural rules about the sanctity of life and marriage", the Devil says, "You don't have to listen to the Bible..." Henry Ford, founder of Ford Motor Company, was asked by a reporter; "To what do you attribute your 50 years of successful married life?" "The formula," said Ford, "is the same formula I have always used in making cars - just stick to one model." I believe most of our overt sin could be eliminated if we could only stick to the first Commandment, having no other gods in our lives. Martin Luther famously said anything that comes between you and the Lord your God is your idol. It doesn't matter if your god is looking at a beautiful person of the opposite sex on your neighbor's roof or anyplace else, when your lustful mind separates you from God, it has become your idol. It might be addiction to shopping or video games. It might be watching television or playing golf on Sundays. Whatever it is that separates you from God has become your god...

Why should we pay attention to this old story about King David and his adultreing ways? Back when I was a brand new officer in the Air Force my first boss used to berate and belittle the other officers for their lapses and failings in front of all of us in the staff meetings. I was too new to experience the brunt of his ire, but it got so intense I went to our commander and asked her why he did that. I never forgot her answer and it has served me well. She said he put those officer's behaviors front and center so that the rest of us could learn from their mistakes and avoid making the same errors. We can all learn from David's mistakes. When I say we can all learn from David's mistakes I'm not talking about sticking to one model and never sinning again. I'm pretty sure that's not possible for the likes of the human species. We'll always be sinners... No, what I'm talking about is learning from David what to do when we come to realize our sins. As much as God wants humans to love Him and each other, when we fail, and we will fail, God loves us even more when we repent and live our lives differently afterward. I think that's what it means when the Bible tells us God looks at what's inside of us. God knows when we sin and God knows when we're truly sorry. I believe God knew David's sorrow and forgave all his inequity.

May we be people who see ourselves in light of both our sin and God's forgiveness. May we live our lives repenting every day from the old Adam and Eve in us so that we can walk in newness innocence, and in love. Amen.