

You Are the Man – August 16, 2015

2 Samuel 11:26 – 12:13a

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Last week we heard the beginning of this story about David's plummet into wickedness. While his generals and army were off doing what generals and armies do, King David stayed home. And whether due to idleness, monotony, or poor timing, David took an afternoon stroll on the rooftop of his palatial estate. As he scanned the surroundings, his eyes lingered on a private courtyard where a beautiful woman was bathing. After inquiring about her identity, he learned her name was Bathsheba, the wife of one of his soldiers. His desire for her squashed his sense of morality.

In a quick succession of poor choices, David sent for her, had his way with her, and sent her away. He used his kingly power to satisfy his own selfish lust, without any thought of the consequences. After some time had passed, Bathsheba sent word to David that she was pregnant.

David's immediate reaction was to send for her husband, Uriah the Hittite – to bring him home for a brief holiday from the war so that he might visit his wife and take advantage of the respite. Bathsheba's pregnancy would then be covered. However, Uriah refused to indulge his desires while his companions were still at war. David tried to ply him with alcohol to lower his inhibitions, but still Uriah refused. Engulfed by his sin, David saw no way out of this mess that he had caused. He penned a letter to his general, instructing him to place Uriah at the front where the fighting was the heaviest and see that he was slain.

And that's where we left off last week. Noting how our primal desires, when indulged, can overwhelm our sense of right and wrong and lead to self-serving actions.

Not long after, a messenger came with the news that Uriah was dead. This was no accident of war. It was an act of malice and cunning. Though he did not wield the sword that struck the killing blow, David murdered Uriah.

Bathsheba was given the proper time to lament her husband, a period of only seven days. Then David made her his wife. The pregnancy was legitimized and Bathsheba bore David a son. David's sins were covered up. Or so he believed. However God saw what David had done, and it was evil in God's eyes. And God was not about to let David get away with it.

God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David. Instead of directly pointing out David's sins, Nathan chose to tell David a parable. Listening to Nathan's words, David got caught up in the drama of the story, and in the end, succeeded in pronouncing judgment upon himself.

Nathan came to David and told him the following story. In a certain city, there lived two men. One of them was very rich, having many flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. The other man was extremely poor and had nothing but one small ewe lamb. This lamb he raised himself as he raised his own children. He cared greatly for the lamb, and fed her from his meager plate and let her drink from his own cup, and he treasured her very much, as much as a daughter, and embraced the lamb to his chest. A traveler came to visit the rich man. The rich man refused to take an animal from his own

extensive flocks to feed this traveler, so he took the poor man's pet and prepared the lamb for the traveler as food.

When David heard this story that Nathan told to him, he was immediately enraged. Thinking it was a judicial case brought before him to serve judgment; he gave an oath "The man deserves to die! He will make reparation to the poor man for this callous and selfish and unjust act." And Nathan pointed his finger at David and exclaimed, "You are the man!"

David was stunned, but Nathan didn't stop there. The prophet continued, lashing the king with the words of God. I gave you the throne and saved you from the wrath of King Saul. I gave you his house and his wives. I gave you the houses of Israel and Judah. And if that had not been enough, I would have given more to you! Why have you despised my word, my commandments and done evil in my sight? You killed Uriah the Hittite and took his wife for yourself. Because of this, your house shall feel the sword and your own wives will be taken. And this will be done in the sight of all Israel!

Finally seeing the reprehensibility his own actions, David was struck by the enormity of what he had done. David cried out in repentance, "I have sinned against the Lord." David could have dismissed the prophet's words. He could have told him to mind his own business. He could have even killed Nathan; he certainly had no problem killing Uriah.

Yet despite his fallenness, despite his wrongdoings, David was still at heart, a servant of God. Even though he allowed his own lust and power to interfere with his relationship to God, when confronted by his sin, he was willing to finally own up to what he did and repent. And because of this, God spared David's own life.

Up until this passage of Scripture, David had been portrayed as an upright and righteous man, following God's law and serving as an example of what it means to be "a man after God's own heart. But here in this story, the dark side of David comes out. He's devious, a scoundrel. An adulterer and a murderer. But in spite of all his villainy, David still loved God. But more importantly God still loved David. No amount of sinning could keep God from loving David.

This morning as we hear about these things that David did, we are sickened. It is easy for us to sit back, and wag our fingers as we pass judgment on David. Living in our own web of self-deceit, it's easy to pronounce condemnation on the sins of others. How could he act on his lust for Bathsheba, doesn't he already have access to enough women? How dare he write the death warrant on an innocent soldier, just to cover up his own mess! And just about the time we are ready to condemn David for his heinous sins, we jump back, startled, as the finger of Nathan the prophet is thrust into our own faces. He exclaims, You are the one! David's story is our story. We are the sinners.

When we refuse to acknowledge our own culpability, we become trapped, liked David did, trying to cover one sin with another sin, until we begin to spiral down into a bottomless pit of crimes and cover-ups. Though we believe ourselves to be the gods of our own little worlds, in actuality, we become slaves to the power of sin in our lives. We deceive ourselves with rationalization and justification of

our sinful acts. If, on the other hand, we confess our sin to God, we open ourselves to the limitless power of God's grace and forgiveness.

Presbyterian pastor and writer, Eugene Peterson had this to say, "The basic, fundamental condition of our humanity is God. We're created by God. We're redeemed by God. We're blessed by God. We're provided for by God. We're loved by God. Sin is the denial or ignorance or avoidance of that basic condition. Sin is the word we use to designate the perverseness of will by which we attempt being our own gods, or making for ourselves other gods. Sin isn't essentially a moral term, designating items of wrongdoing; it's a spiritual term, designating our God-avoidance and our god-pretensions." (*Leap Over a Wall*, p. 187)

David's sinful acts took him further and further from God's presence. When confronted by the prophet Nathan, David quickly saw the wrongs he had committed. Nathan broke through David's self-deception. David finally recognized that he had put himself as god of his own life over against the one true God. His repentance was deep and true. And God forgave him. Does this mean that everything is put back to right? Of course not. Poor choices still have consequences and negative impacts. And that's a topic for another day.

Sin erodes our relationship with God. As we put ourselves first, or place our wants before the needs of others, or attempt to set our own status above that of others, we replace God with an image of ourselves. We are quick to forget that all people are created in God's image.

Like David, we too are all sinners. We all blow it. We fall short every day – in our thoughts, in our words, in our actions. That is why we begin our time of worship each Sunday with our corporate prayer of confession. We acknowledge our own frailties. We acknowledge that we fall far short of the model of selfless love that Christ has shown us.

But when we confess our faults, we are always assured of God's good news - that through Jesus Christ our sins are forgiven. It is an incomprehensible gift. We could never earn it on our own. We certainly don't deserve it. It is by grace that we are set free. All we have to do is get past our own self-deceptions, recognize that we are sinners, confess those sins before God, and embrace the magnificent gift of God's grace.

There's a story told about St Francis that I'll share with you now.

St Francis and his assistant brother Leo were traveling one day, and at the time of evening prayer, they realized they didn't have a prayer book. So Francis told Leo he would teach him what to say so that Francis could give his confession. Francis said, "I will give my confession and say, 'I, Brother Francis have done so many evil deeds and deserve hell!' and then you say, 'Yes, it is true that you deserve the depths of hell.'"

Brother Leo confirmed that he understood what to do, and said to Francis, "Begin in the name of the Lord."

And Francis began, "I, Brother Francis, have done so many evil deeds and deserve hell."

Brother Leo replied, "God will perform so much good in you that you will go to paradise."

St Francis was quite upset and said, "No, say this, You deserve to go to hell!"

Brother Leo responded, "Yes, Father, I will try again."

And Francis said, "I, Brother Francis, am a wicked sinner, enjoying evil, and deserve only the fires of hell."

Brother Leo replied, "God loves you and will work amazing deeds of goodness through you that you will enter paradise."

Again, Francis was angered. "Brother Leo, you need to focus. Try again."

This happened two more times, with St Francis instructing Brother Leo to say more and more extravagant and damnable words. And Brother Leo would reply with more and more words of forgiveness from God and God's great pleasure in St Francis.

"Why is this happening?" cried St Francis. "Why do you disobey me?"

Brother Leo said, "Every time I resolve to answer as you instructed me, but God makes me speak as God pleases. The only words God gives are of grace and forgiveness. I can't say anything else because God is speaking through me."