

2 Samuel 11:26–12:13a; John 6:24–35

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

Our lesson from last week: David is king. He should be out with his troops in battle, but instead, he's lounging around the palace in Jerusalem. While there, he spies an attractive woman. He invites her to the palace, where, whether willingly or unwillingly (probably willingly) he has intimate relations with her, regardless of the fact that she is already married to somebody else, and more specifically, that somebody else is one of the king's elite guard. Unsurprisingly, she winds up pregnant. So, the king devises a plan to cover his tracks that involves that legal, loyal husband to appear to be the sire of the offspring. This plan fails when that soldier does not comply with the (to him) unknown plan. Said failure forces the king to rethink his plan, and he turns to the extermination of that soldier with the aid of his own general.

Once the loyal retainer is out of the picture, and a suitable period of mourning has passed, David - dashing David, gallant, chivalrous, and charming David, David, who plotted the death of her husband - King David marries the widow Bathsheba. The widow of Uriah the Hittite, former member of the elite guard, sworn to fealty to king and country.

David thinks he's pulled it off. I mean, who knows? There's just: David; Bathsheba; Joab the general; Uriah's fellow soldiers; the servants who were complaisant in bringing Bathsheba from her house to the palace; the servants who aided in getting Uriah drunk even though he didn't go back to his own house. Who are we forgetting - oh, yeah - there was God.

Why is it that humans tend to think we can pull a fast one on God? If God is that which we say that God is - in other words, if we define God as being greater than anything we can imagine - why is it we think we human beings can fool God?

God always knows. God knows what we do. God knows the good stuff that we do. God knows the not-so-good stuff that we do. So the fact that Nathan, the successor to Samuel the prophet, shows up at the palace really shouldn't surprise anyone, let alone David.

Nathan is apparently not an unfamiliar site. His presence does not set off any alarms, at least not at first. He even has a rather interesting tale of injustice to share with his royal majesty the King:

There was a rich man with many flocks, and a poor man, who had only one lamb. This lamb was like a child to him. He fed it; he bathed it; he shared sleeping quarters with it. Yet, when a guest came to the rich man, rather than taking from his own abundance, the rich man forcibly took the poor man's animal, had it slaughtered and prepared, and served to his guest.

We need to remember that up to this point David has been presented as a very righteous kind of guy. He's always fighting against injustice. He had been fighting against the injustice of King Saul for years. He had been striving to live as the Lord God Almighty wanted him to. So David is outraged at this story. David imagines that it is an actual fact. And he says, as we heard in

verse 5 – I can imagine him being barely able to contain himself as he says: "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die."

I have to pause for dramatic effect here because this is one of those stories that I would love to have been the proverbial "fly on the wall". I have often wondered, every time I read this story, I wonder if, upon hearing David's answer, Nathan points his arm and cries out in a voice that blasts David to the back of the room: "You are the man!" Or does Nathan just lock eyes with him, and speaking in a voice so quiet you can hear a pin drop, say to David: "You. Are. The. Man."

On a positive note, David is chastised by this. He knew that he had done that which he ought not to have done. But he thought he got away with it. When he was called on it, instead of plausible deniability; instead of saying, it's not my fault; instead of arguing that "I am not an adulterer;" or "it all depends on what the definition of the word 'is' is," David simply says, "I have sinned against the LORD." Isn't that a breath of fresh air? A person taking responsibility for their actions. A politician accepting blame for something that they have done. No "I was trapped;" "I was enticed;" "I was deceived;" "It's not my fault." No. Very simply, David says, "I have sinned against the LORD."

What if we all were to do that? What if we all were to accept responsibility for our actions? What if we all were to confess from our hearts, not this general confession with which we began worship, but if we were to go one on one with God and begin to list all the things that we have done: the mean thoughts we've had; the way that I wasn't a nice, polite driver today as I often try to see myself in my head; the way that I've lusted after electronics, or my wife? But what if I say to God, "I have sinned against you, LORD."

Another thing to remember is that sin is more than just individual. We can sin corporately, too. We have sinned as a country. We have sinned as a denomination. We have sinned as a gender. We have sinned as people of specific ethnic heritage. It doesn't matter what Country or Denomination or Gender or Ethnic heritage we are. We have corporately sinned.

We have sinned in the way in which Americans treated American Indians in the 1800s or the way Americans treated Japanese Americans in the 1940s or Middle easterners during the past ten years. We have sinned in the way in which Lutherans have defended or ignored the bigoted writings of Martin Luther. Or the manner in which Lutherans ignored the Nazi slaughter. The way we have sinned in which males have abused females or how women have caused men to fall. The way in which any ethnic heritage has attempted to say that because of their heritage, they were superior to all other heritages. Sin is corporate as well as individual.

But, just as sin is both corporate and individual, so too is repentance, and the good that can come from repentance. I came across an excerpt written by Daniel P. Smith and Mary K. Sellon, authors of *Pathway to Renewal: Practical Steps for Congregations*. They were writing on a blog and they made an interesting observation:

"Your congregation is what it is today not because of what a bad pastor did to it, or because the neighborhood has changed or because our culture is going to hell in a handbasket. Although those occurrences and many others have had an impact, your congregation is what it is today because of how it responded, or failed to respond, to the

realities it faced. What your congregation will be in the future is up to you and the other members and how you work together to create something new from the realities you face. What you do or don't do now will make the difference. Your actions will either reinforce the patterns that have become established in your congregation or start to counter and shift them. The leadership provided by your pastor can help or hinder, but it cannot make your congregation succeed or keep it from ultimately achieving the goals you set for yourselves.”

In other words, we can work together and really do good stuff, or we can work together and really mess things up.

There are consequences either way, both positive and negative. In accepting the consequences for his negative – that is, sinful – actions, David, in the long run, received some very positive consequences. God blesses David, and gives him a good son. As a matter of fact, the son that comes from the union of David and Bathsheba is Solomon, who is known as the greatest king of the kingdom.

Now, that isn't always the case. We need to remember that we deal on a human level, and our example, our story tonight, focuses more on the divine setting. Forgiveness and healing can, and does, happen in human terms, as well as in divine terms. Sometimes the consequences of our actions in human terms mean that along with forgiveness we might have to go to jail, or pay a fine, or lose friendship, or go to summer school.

God does forgive. We see that with David. David was called to account for his sin, admitted his sin, confessed his sin, and is forgiven. Humans forgive, too. We presume that Bathsheba forgave David because she continued on with him as his wife. Just like the story of David and Bathsheba, so much of our own stories revolve around how we sin and how we deal with the sin that we do, and the sin that others do to us. That sin, though, helps us to grow as humans. That sin helps make us better believers. That sin reinforces how we are called to live. For it is what we learn when we sin, and more importantly, what we learn when we are forgiven, that makes us the believers that we are today.

Amen.