

## **“A Sin Confessed is Half Forgiven”**

Salado UMC—5 August 2018: 11<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost

Preaching Text: 2 Samuel 11:26—12:13a—Year B

Salado, Texas 76571

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**“Nothing spoils a confession like repentance”**

**—Anatole France (1844—1924).**

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Last Sunday we noted that when God hears our sincere prayers of repentance, then God forgives us. Hebrews 10:18 teaches “Where there is forgiveness of these [transgressions], there is no longer any offering for sin.” In the context of last week’s scripture lesson, David’s sin of adultery and subsequent cover-up, we have a handle on forgiveness. Forgiveness is one of God’s most prized gifts to us. We have considered both David’s public as well as private persona. In last week’s lesson David certainly learned about forgiveness the hard way. Perhaps we can learn from David’s experience. Psalm 51 is a classic prayer of penance and David’s earnest plea for clemency and restoration. Of course, perhaps David prayed it long after our lesson to which we now turn:

**[26] When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. [27] When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, [12:1] and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. [2] The rich man had very many flocks and herds; [3] but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. [4] Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man’s lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.” Then David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; [6] he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.”**

**[7] Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; [8] I gave you your master’s house, and your master’s wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. [9] Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. [10] Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.**

**[11] Thus says the Lord: “I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives**

**in the sight of this very sun. [12] For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.” [13] David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Nathan said to David, “Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die” (2 Samuel 11:26–12:13).**

In a nutshell, today’s text first tells us that Bathsheba mourns Uriah. After a short time—a brief period of mourning—she moves into the royal palace “before she shows.” In due course she delivers a son. But the text ominously tells us that “the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, and the Lord sent Nathan to David.” As Nathan enters the story he becomes the pivotal character. It is Nathan that turns this whole sordid adultery business God-ward. Nathan spins a yarn about a lamb, a parable that hammers David with a painful and embarrassingly fitting prophetic word.

Nathan is God’s prophet. This is another way of saying Nathan was God’s delegate. Prophecy today seems baffling to many. It is often a domain of those who scare us half-way to death—and sometime prophets do this. Yet from a biblical perspective, prophets were God’s righteous mouthpieces. They spoke the Word of God. When they announced “Thus says the Lord” then they “afflicted the comfortable and comforted the afflicted.” In other words, prophets are not so much like our modern weather forecasters. Rather they are more like those who say, “If present trends continue, then this and/or that will come to pass . . . .”

Prophets stood fundamentally against two things: idolatry and oppression. Nathan knew David’s heart and therefore knew that David was no mere idolater. Yet, David oppressed Uriah (and by extension Bathsheba), thereby depriving each of his/her human rights. As far back as the Pentateuch, the so-called “Five Books of Moses,” we see the biblical gravity regarding oppression Deuteronomy 27:19 reads: “Cursed be anyone who deprives the alien, the orphan, and the widow of justice.” Our scriptural tradition has always been interested in the avoidance of tyranny of the “so called” minor or less significant with respect to power—the widow, orphan, sojourner. Exodus chimes in by reminding the people: “You shall not abuse any widow or orphan” (Exodus 22:22).

Prophets are exceedingly brave because they spoke to kings—in other words—to power. In virtually any royal realm beside Israel, about ten minutes after Nathan said to the king “You are the man” his head would have been severed from his body. Yet, Israel was always the exception among nations. Why?—because Yahweh plays no favorites. In David’s/Bathsheba’s story, Yahweh measures David by the identical standard as all Israelites—man, woman, or child. Israel learns that no one—not even a king—is above Yahweh’s law.

Nathan not only believed what he was saying—Nathan seemingly feared no one! He continues reminding David that although “the Lord has put away your sin” there are even so consequences for the king’s actions. First the child born of the illicit union will die. Second, the sword shall never depart from David’s dynasty. Third, God will raise up trouble against David even from within his own household. Fourth, God will take David’s wives and give them to his neighbors. For David there is a dear price to pay for his thoughtless and willful indiscretions!

Despite these grim costs, the Lord allows David to live—which is more than Uriah got out of the transaction. David confesses his sin and God offers pardon. David like Jacob before him ends up limping all the rest of his days from his Yahweh encounter. For while God supplies forgiveness, we also understand that God allows us to suffer our consequences. I offer a word from Daniel as we prepare our hearts and minds for holy communion this morning:

**To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against God, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by following divine laws, which the Lord set before us by God's servants the prophets (Daniel 9:9-10, *my paraphrase*).**

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