



Poland Presbyterian Church

At the Green since 1802

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August 2, 2015

10th Sunday after Pentecost

A Sermon by Brent J. Eelman

"You!"

II Samuel 11:26-12:13a

When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. ²⁷When 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, and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, 'There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had very many flocks and herds; ³but 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. ⁴Now 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.' ⁵Then 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; ⁶he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.'

⁷Nathan 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; ⁸I 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. ⁹Why 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. ¹⁰Now 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. ¹¹Thus 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. ¹²For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.' ¹³David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.'

You might not know about my early life of crime. I grew up on a university and seminary campus. My father was a professor and I, with a host of other faculty children were known as "seminary brats".

Our home was within a hundred yards of a large gymnasium that the seminary owned. It was usually locked, but we seminary brats were quite adept at finding the loose window or door and would often break in and play basketball. On one occasion, we decided to do some exploring and discovered in one of the rooms, adjacent to the gym, there were about 20 cases of bottled soda. There was no one's name on it. There was no sign that said it should be left alone, and so we thought that some nice soul had put it there so that we could slake our thirst after our basketball game. That night I think I drank about 18 bottles of cream soda. This all occurred approximately 50 years ago. We got away with it. It was my secret sin, hidden for all this time.

About five years ago, while at a presbytery meeting, I ran into a colleague who was one of my father's students. He had some kind words about my father and we started to reminisce about the "good old days" at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. I then told my story about how the "seminary brats" broke into the gym and drank all the soda. He suddenly turned pale and his expression changed. He looked at me and said. "You are the one!"

He then went on to tell that he was in charge of the school's soda concession back then, and he always wondered how his books came up so short that one year. He was sure that someone was pilfering soda from him, and he never caught them..... until that moment nearly 45 years later. "You are the one!"

We can laugh now and every time I saw him after then, he reminded me of my "criminal" past. He was asked to publicly introduce me as a speaker for an event, and, sure enough, he used that story. The lesson? If anyone thinks that they can cover up their sins and indiscretions, they should remember this. The truth eventually comes out. "You" "You are the one." You can't cover up or hide your sin, even if it is only stealing soda. But the story of sin in the bible today is much juicier than 18 bottles of cream soda.

The great Danish Philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard wrote this about life in the 19th Century:

"Let other complain that the age is wicked; my complaint is that it is paltry; for it lacks passion....Their lusts are dull and sluggish, their passions sleepy...This is the reason my soul always turns back to the Old Testament and to Shakespeare. I feel that those who speak there are at least human beings: they hate, they love, they murder their enemies, and curse their descendants throughout all generations, they sin."

Kierkegaard would have loved the text from II Samuel that I read to you this morning. It isn't about ripping off a few bottles of cream soda. No, this is a story of love and hate, of murder and intrigue. It is a story filled with sin... not banal, boring, pedestrian sin. This

story has the big ones: lust, adultery, murder, and an attempted cover-up. This story is neither sluggish nor sleepy. So hang on to your hats.

I

David was the greatest King of Israel. He was the monarch during its "golden years." He was fearless in battle. He was able to consolidate the tribes and ward off those who would conquer them. Under his leadership the 12 tribes of Israel became a nation. He was the type of individual about whom legends are spun. Tales abound about his greatness, not merely as a monarch and military figure, but also as a musician and poet. His resume was long and included a number of wonderful attributes. To this list of accomplishments we need to add: adultery, murder, and cover-up.

Most of us are familiar with the story of David and Bathsheba. David was surveying his kingdom one night when he saw Bathsheba bathing. He was overcome with lust and used his power to seduce her. She became pregnant and David wished to avoid responsibility for this child. He attempted to arrange things so that Bathsheba's husband Uriah, a military general, would appear to be the father of her child. His ruse failed. Consequently, David arranged to put him in a position in battle where he would surely be killed. He was, and David's problem was presumably solved. No one would ever know. Except God.

God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David. Nathan told David a story about someone who had many sheep and coveted a poor neighbor's lamb. He finally killed the neighbor and took the lamb. David was filled with righteous indignation and demanded that this individual be brought to justice. Then the prophet delivered the message from God. "You are the man." "You."

II

This narrative stands as a reminder to our generation of a number of things:

1. Great women and men have their moral shortcomings. The greatest ones do not cover them up or hide them. They admit them and own them.

We have a need for heroes. There is something about humanity that places people on pedestals: teachers, politicians, coaches, clergy, parents and others. David was an individual who was put on a pedestal. No one can deny his greatness, but neither can we deny his moral failures. That is the reality of human sinfulness. Those whom we put on pedestals are all too human and as great and important as they are, our glorification of them needs a healthy dose of realism. They are not gods, nor worthy

of our worship. Sometimes we humans have a way of projecting such expectations on people and it is unhealthy. They begin to believe that they are above the law and begin to act that way. (Sports)

2. We, you and I, have our own sinfulness and moral shortcomings. We would like to cover up those things. We might even think that we have hidden something for a long time, (like 18 bottles of cream soda)... but ultimately what we have hidden is only our integrity. We have hidden it from ourselves. Cover-ups never work, and hidden sin is a heavy load to carry through life. If there is a subtitle to this sermon: it is "ME" We each have to be honest with ourselves about our own moral failures.
3. God Knows. We can't hide our behavior from God. Like an Agatha Christie mystery, the truth is ultimately revealed.

III

But there is also good news in this ancient story: Confession and forgiveness.

There is a trend in worship that is tending toward eliminating any type of confession of sin from worship. In one of my former congregations I was informed that they had focus groups on worship before I arrived and one of their significant learnings was that the prayer of confession was "a real downer" and consequently they removed it from their Sunday worship.

Was God part of that focus group? Do we, like David, wish to deny our sinful behavior? If we do, we deny the grace of God. We deprive ourselves and other of the joy of forgiveness.

Today's Psalm is intimately tied to the Bible story. It is from

Psalm 51, and is David's prayer asking for God's forgiveness:

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.*

This prayer is wonderfully realistic and offers relief to all who bear the burden of secret sin. The final petition contains the promise that we know through Christ's forgiveness of sin.

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,*

*and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

The good news of this sermon is that God, although all knowing, is also all forgiving. Through Jesus he invites all who burdened and heavy laden with sin and guilt to come to him and experience, in David's words, the joy of His salvation. The Prophet Nathan pointed his finger at David and cried, "You are the man! You!" Christ looks upon us, contrite sinners, and declares "You.....You are forgiven!"

This is the good news. Amen.