

File: 2 Samuel 12:1-13 Nathan and David

Dear Friends in Christ, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and savior Jesus Christ, Amen!

Do you have a TV show you don't want to admit you watch? I do, it's called Scandal. Sometimes after watching it I say to myself "well there's an hour of my life I'll never get back". The plot always involves some combination of murder lust and betrayal. It certainly makes for fascinating TV and movies. But it's not very great in real life. If they would have had TV in OT times today's reading would have been the ancient version of Scandal. There are two main character's, the not so famous prophet Nathan, and the very famous King David, he of David and Goliath fame when he was a boy and the whole slingshot thing.

Well little David has grown up and become a great King over Israel. But like so many people in Scripture God uses very fallible, you might say very "human people" to do important things. Allow me for a moment to set the context for the reading this morning.

In Chapter 12 just before our reading King David was on his rooftop one day and saw a beautiful woman named Bathsheba taking a bath. Consumed by his lust and power---as King he calls for her and let's just say she ends up pregnant. King David, trying to cover his tracks sends Bathsheba's husband Uriah into the front

lines of battle so he will be killed so he can legitimize his relationship with Bathsheba. Chapter 12 is an account of murder, lust and betrayal which brings us to our reading for this morning where as they say ‘The chickens will come home to roost.’”

So God sends the prophet Nathan and he begins by telling King David a story about sheep, and King David likes stories. A traveler comes to town and man of means welcomes him. He offers to feed him but instead of taking one of his own sheep for the feast he takes one from the poorest guy in town. King David understands that this was very wrong and the Bible says **“David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan : As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for the lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.” And Nathan said to David “You are that man.”**

Nathan is referring to the events of the previous chapter and King David obviously didn’t see himself in Nathan’s story. Nathan had some real guts being the truth teller to the King. King David needed to hear the truth. And we’re all blessed to have a “truth teller” in our lives. But here’s the problem with truth tellers in our lives. There are truth tellers, and then there are truth tellers.

Sometimes a truth teller isn't always another person. Sometimes it's the Holy Spirit or our inner voice calling for change----But---sometimes a truth teller in our lives is another human being.

Some people who consider themselves truth tellers really aren't interested in your well-being. They're more interested in being cynical and critical. They take pride in saying something like "well I just tell it like it is"---at least according to them. This kind of truth teller doesn't care how they say it or how it's received they just like spewing their words at other people because it makes them feel better about themselves.

Then there's the other kind of truth teller—the kind we all need. The kind who has our best interest at heart, they don't nit-pick at every little thing; they choose their timing and words wisely so they are more likely to be heard. Nathan was that kind of truth teller for King David.

Because of Nathan King David learns a lesson about recovery from sin. He had his own crippling fall that involved deceit, murder and adultery and the Bible records his deeds in all of their ugliness. Part of the problem with Biblical accounts like these is they seem so extreme. Our actions may not be exactly like King David's so we say to ourselves well that's great for David in the Bible but it doesn't really apply to me.

But I invite you to think of it like this: We're fairly attentive to matters of our physical safety. If we break a bone, or the Dr. discovers a medical problem that needs immediate attention we're pretty open to treatment even if it's not easy because we want to be healed. But when it comes to matters of the heart or our sin or our relationship with God, our lives are filled with so much noise that we don't pay much attention, we always think it's somebody else's problem "after all, hey I'm okay".

But when we had those ashes placed on our forehead on Wednesday and heard those words "*You are dust and to dust you shall return*" and had our lengthy confession and we'll do our confession this morning, those were the words of our truth teller-God who says there's a problem whether we want to admit it or not.

Like us at times when it comes to God, King David was living in denial (as the old joke says de-nial is not just a river in Egypt). He's trying to forget the whole matter, to bury the guilt of what he's done. He still says his prayers, worships the Lord and sits on the throne. But God won't allow David to forget for two very important reasons. The first is the danger of not being honest about the depth of sin and secondly God doesn't want David or you and me to go into toxic shame and forget how God sees us.

That's why in the passage with King David don't overlook God's mercy and also with you and me don't overlook god's mercy. The Lord could have left David crippled by his guilt, but no; God's goal is to lead David to experience recovery, just as God's goal is to lead you and me to the experience the joy of recovery from sin and guilt.

We can get pretty angry and upset and see sin in others that seems worse than ours. That's because we judge others by their actions but only look our intent. "Oh but my intentions were good" we say to ourselves and so we continue down the path of denial. But God is merciful he won't let us stay in denial. No one likes to feel convicted of stuff but the truth is conviction and confession are really good for our souls because it let us see ourselves for who we really are.

It leads us from confession and conviction to cleansing. In the case of King David the OT law was clear in terms of punishment for what he did. There were no exceptions made even for a king David is under a double sentence of death. King David makes his confession in verse 13 when he says "I have sinned against the Lord." And then Nathan's remarkable words to him "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die."

What's happening here? Why does God forgive a man who has committed such terrible sins? Because God wants to make sure you and I get a very personal

message: that God will forgive and cleanse even the worst sinner who comes to repentance and faith.

King David can no longer live in denial. In Psalm 51 he writes “Have mercy on me O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me...”

King David has come clean before God, he is truly sorry for his sin. He doesn't try to hide or deny. He knows he's done wrong and pleads for forgiveness. God didn't spare David because of his goodness or because he was King. It is purely God's grace that saves him and cleanses him. King David was willing to face the truth.

Sometimes the truth is hard to face up to especially when it's truth we don't like to hear. In a world where I'm ok you're ok, we're all ok, the Biblical truth is without the Lord and forgiveness we're not okay. And what at first seems like bad news or as some might say “focusing on the negative” is actually good news because it's puts us in front of God recognizing our need for The Lord.

God cleanses you and me too, just like King David, not because we're good enough, or because we have good intentions, or because some people just get off the hook, we make recovery from sin, recovery in the sense of forgiveness because

of God. And it's really hard to ever fully conceive of, appreciate or worship The Lord in all his majesty if we don't understand our need for Grace.

But let's understand that while we are relieved of the eternal consequences of our sins it doesn't always free us from the earthly consequences. Even after you recover from a fall, we may carry the scars with us. We may have hurt others with our behavior or attitudes and forgiveness from them or for them may be hard to get to. Though forgiven, our sins through our behaviors and attitudes towards all kind of people and things can be passed on to future generations. We can't always undo what we've done, we can't always unsay what we've said even after God forgives but God does reserve the right to use our biggest mistakes and even our sin to bring the Lord honor.

Charles was a man who worked hard to get to the top. He served in the marines before becoming a lawyer and entering politics.. He worked hard and finally made it all the way to the position of special assistant to the President of the United States. He became so ruthless he was known as the President's hatchet man. One person said Charles would run over his own grandmother for the President's sake-now that's ruthless.

Charles met his defeat during the Watergate scandal—One of the great blemishes on our country's great history. Charles was convicted of some of the

same crimes as President Nixon and put in prison. The man who had climbed the ladder was now at the bottom of the barrel. Or to say it another way he fell from the penthouse to the outhouse.

While in prison someone shared with him the great love and mercy and forgiveness of Christ and he became a Christian and was a changed man. He eventually started a ministry called Prison Fellowship that still is thriving to this day and became a living testimony to the power of God.

What god did for King David, What god did for chuck Colson, he's willing to do for you and me. While you and I aren't Biblical characters we see the story of our lives all throughout the bible. The story of sin and forgiveness, the story of death and resurrection—that's what lent is all about that's the good news of Lent.

