

Pastor Gregory P. Fryer  
Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY  
6/16/2013, The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost  
2 Samuel 11:26--12:10, 13-15, Psalm 32, Galatians 2:15-21, Luke 7:36--8:3

In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

<sup>5</sup>And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: <sup>6</sup>And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. <sup>7</sup>And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. (2 Samuel 12:5-7, KJV)

## THOU ART THE MAN!

If you have ever done something awful, this sermon is for you. We are not angels. We live in a fallen world, and we can fall deeply into sin. We are capable of plotting evil, or simply yielding to doing it in a moment, and then afterwards we are left with deep regret. Weakness and wickedness can leave us haunted by experiences like these:

- † We emerge from the fog of rage and survey the wreck and ruin we have laid down.
- † The fire of lust at last subsides, and we stand aghast at what we have done.
- † The alcohol and drugs wear off and we see that our life is forever changed after giving the drugs sway in our life last night.
- † Or our eyes suddenly become open, as it were, and we see that the years have slipped by and we have wasted, wasted so many opportunities and they are gone for good.

Altogether, if any of us have taken a step that spelled ruination for ourself or for someone else, listen to this story of King David. It is the story of a conscience-stricken man.

The story is quickly told: In the springtime of the year, “at the time when kings go forth to battle,”<sup>1</sup> David did not go forth to battle, but instead tarried still at Jerusalem. And while he tarried, he strolled about on the roof of the king's house, and from there he saw a woman bathing, “and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.” So, he took her. He was the king. He simply summoned her to his bed. It did not matter to him that she was married—

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel 11:1, KJV

indeed that she was married to one of David's own loyal soldiers. David simply arranged for that man's death. Then David enjoyed his adultery until the prophet Nathan came along and confronted him with the sordid truth: Thou art the man! Thou are the unjust man who showed no pity.

## **A TRULY AWFUL DEED**

Notice that we are speaking of a deed that is truly wrong. Indeed, I think we could say that David's deed was not simply wrong, but also evil. This is not a story about imaginary sin, but the real thing!

Let me pause for two clarifications along these lines. First, I am not speaking of a deed that someone might *consider* to be awful, but is not really so awful as that one fears. Sometimes when I am hearing a Private Confession, I encounter such discouragement and guilt that I feel I must try to lift up the heart of the penitent by pointing out that in the large perspective, this particular deed is not so bad, and that the penitent is being too hard on himself, too hard on herself, and that with the Lord, there is forgiveness of sin.

But in the case of David, there is no distinction between feeling that the deed is awful and it in fact being an awful deed. What David did is that kind of a deed. It is an awful one.

And second, it does not matter that David at first *discounts* the deed. He commits rape and murder and goes about his merry way. But it does not matter what he thinks about this deed. It is in fact awful, whether he appreciates that fact or not.

Other kings might have done similar things as David and never gave it a second thought. But shame on public officials who betray their people by betraying morality. I do not care if every nobleperson in the realm patted King David on the back, called him a good man, congratulated him on getting with the program, he in fact was not a good man until he repented of what he had done to Bathsheba and Uriah. And if he had written all the Psalms we cherish, but did not repent of what he did to Bathsheba and Uriah, he is a bad man!

So, let this point be established: King David sinned most grievously. Now, let's turn to his repentance.

## **DAVID'S REPENTANCE**

Let me begin by speaking not of King David but of another David: my friend David Yeago. Dr. Yeago has preached here at Immanuel a few times—mostly recently this past Fifth Sunday in Lent.

One of David Yeago's important themes is that "salvation involves judgment." At first glance, this might sound strange. In fact, we might be

tempted to think almost the reverse. That is, we might be tempted to think that salvation means “escape from judgment,” rather than enduring judgment.

But Dr. Yeago points out that sin involves the spoiling of our souls. Sin is not simply departure from the ways of God. It is also an assault upon our own humanity. Sin means corruption, and we ought not rest content with being corrupted. We need judgment that we might have some chance to be healed of a disease that it is sapping our strength and robbing us of the nobility our Maker intends for us.

There is a striking verse in Romans 1 that speaks of the Lord abandoning sinners to the desires of their hearts:

*24*Therefore God *gave them up* in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves... (Romans 1:24, NRSV)

David once told me that as a young man, maybe as early as junior high school, that verse struck him as terrifying. The notion of God giving up on us, and leaving us spinning downward in our sinful desires seems to be the very foretaste of hell. Salvation does not mean affirmation of our sins, but judgment of our sin, so that we can have a chance to repent and mend our ways and become healthy again.

## DAVID AND NATHAN

So, think of King David when the prophet Nathan confronts him with the truth: “Thou art the man! Thou are the unjust man who showed no pity.” How did King David respond to this judgment? How could he have responded?

Well, David was King. He *could have* ordered the execution of Nathan. In fact, such a thing happened with John the Baptist. John preached against Herod and his adultery, with the result that Herod commanded the beheading of the Baptist.

Such a thing could have happened to Nathan. King David could have commanded, “Take him away! Take this arrogant prophet out of my sight. Behead this man who dares to challenge the king.”

Other kings would have understood. Other noblemen would have understood. “After all, David is a man, and a man has his needs! And let no one judge what comes naturally to a man, especially if he is king!”

So, that is how King David *could have* responded to the prophet Nathan. He could have executed the Lord’s prophet. But instead, he confessed his guilt and prayed for mercy. To this very day, we cherish Psalm 51 because it gives us some insight to the profound sorrow of King David for his sin and his longing to be restored to some measure of innocence again:

- <sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God, according to your lovingkindness;  
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.
- <sup>2</sup> Wash me through and through from my wickedness,  
and cleanse me from my sin.
- <sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me...
- <sup>11</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.
- <sup>12</sup> Cast me not away from your presence,  
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
- <sup>13</sup> Give me the joy of your saving help again  
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit. (Psalm 51, LBW)

So, King David does not resist the divine judgment, but yields to it. And in yielding, David starts on the good path again. He starts to become a good man again.

The damage is done. The adultery has been committed, the husband has been murdered, and King David is in for much suffering as a consequence of his sin. Indeed, the first punishment comes upon him quickly. We read about it at the end of this morning's First Lesson: the poor little baby born of David's adultery with Bathsheba sickens and dies. And there is more. As punishment for his sins, David endures a troubled conclusion to his reign, including armed rebellion against him by his own son Absalom.

Note that these troubles followed King David in spite of his confession and repentance. It is the same with us: If we kill someone because of our drunk driving, for example, we will suffer the penalty of law. And this will be in accordance with the will of God, who stands behind all just laws. And if we take drugs and wander off a cliff, we will fall, in accordance with the regularities of gravity by which our Lord rules his creation.

So, David sinned and suffered the consequences of his sin in spite of his repentance. But that he repented made all the difference in the world. Indeed, what we find at the end of the story is an older, sadder King David, but an older, sadder David who begins to show again the dignity and courage and mercy he had shown as a young man.

## **IN CHRIST**

How does one repent? King David repented by acknowledging his sin before the prophet Nathan, by composing his Psalm of Penitence, Psalm 51, and by living out his days as his Psalm had prayed: by seeking a clean heart and a renewed spirit.

How about you and me? We are Christians, many of us. And if you are not yet a Christian, you are mostly earnestly invited to become one. Then, as a Christian, we repent by living in Christ and he in us.

I am pointing now to the magnificent words of Saint Paul in our reading from Galatians 2. Saint Paul says this:

I have been crucified with Christ; <sup>20</sup>and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ *who lives in me*. (Galatians 2:19-20, NRSV)

Suppose you have done something awful in your life. You have yielded to passions like I mentioned at the start of this sermon: to rage, to lust, to drunkenness, to drugs, to the lazy squandering away of so many opportunities.

*Now* is the time to repent. Do not put this off until another day, for tomorrow is promised to no one. Now is the time to start upon the comeback trail.

One good step back is Private Confession. Come to me or to some other pastor, make your confession, go through the pastoral conversation, receive the absolution, and believe it with all your heart.

Receive the absolution with confidence, for the absolution is granted in the name of Jesus Christ, who suffered death that you might not have to, but instead, will have the chance to mend your ways and live a better life.

And as King David slowly began to regain the innocence and dignity of his youth, so you and I should go onward striving to live according to the image of Christ we know. Saint Paul says that it is no longer he who lives, but Christ in him. Let us go onward according to that principle: that we mean to start digging our way out of the hole our sin has cast us into by rising up as best we can toward the image of life we find in Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.