

There once was a man, a very great and powerful man, a beloved man. Everyone looked up to this man. They trusted him, they listened to his wise words, and they depended on him to keep them safe from attackers.

One day, when all of his troops were out at battle, this man, our hero, saw a woman bathing and fell in love with her. When he found out who she was, that she was the wife of one of his soldiers, he sent for her, and he lay with her (as the story politely states). He then sent her to her home. Later she sent word back to him. "I am pregnant", she said. So the great and powerful man, our hero, sent for her husband. He brought him into his rooms, had a long talk with him about how the wars were going, gave him a present, and told him to go back home. The husband did not go back home, though. He stayed around because he was a soldier and his discipline taught him that he was not supposed to take off and go home for a furlough when the army was preparing for war. So, then our hero sent for the husband again. This time he gave the husband much food and drink, and got the husband drunk and told him to go home and be with his wife. But the man did not go home to his wife then either. He stayed the night in our hero's home out of loyalty and gratitude to him for having honored him with an audience and with a meal.

So the great and powerful man, unable to accomplish his goal to get the husband to go home and be with his wife, tried a different tactic. He told his general to send the husband to the front lines in the war and then when the fighting was particularly intense, to withdraw from him, leaving him in a position of sure death. And that worked. The husband bravely went forward to fight the Ammonites and then bravely died in battle. Back at home our hero breathed a sigh of relief. He thought to himself, "Whew! Got away with that one.

Fortunately, I didn't have to make a fool of myself, or be called out by an angry husband, or risk putting his wife at risk of censure or worse."

Meanwhile, the wife, pregnant with our hero's child, mourned for the death of her husband. And then presently, the powerful man sent for her, made her his wife and she bore his child. Our hero, rich and powerful and beloved as he was, had committed a sin, and then compounded it with a greater sin in trying to cover it all up. It's a tale that could just as well be ripped from the headlines today, couldn't it. And this sinner was such a beloved man, both in the eyes of his people, (and in the eyes of God, of course) that once he acknowledged his sin before God and before his spiritual advisor, he was forgiven.

He is known to generations who followed as the greatest King that Israel ever had. He is known as the forbearer of Jesus. He is King David. He as much as murdered a man in cold blood after sleeping with his wife, and he is still named by many in Jesus' day as the ideal king of all time. The Palestinian people, in the years following the Babylonian exile, waited for a King like David.

In the Gospels of both Matthew and Luke, King David, son of Jesse and father of Solomon, is listed in the genealogy to show that Jesus is from the line of the blessed King David. As Zechariah says, in the Gospel of Luke, *"He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David."* In the Acts of the Apostles Paul gives a short version of the history of his people and says, *"He made David their king. In his testimony about him he said, 'I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my heart, who will carry out all my wishes.' Of this man's posterity God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised; (Acts 13:22b-23)*

David would not have survived God's judgment, or history's judgment of him if he hadn't been brought up short by the prophet Nathan. Nathan leads David to understand how wrong he was by telling him a story that goes like this;

**2 Samuel 12:1b-10** "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. <sup>2</sup> The rich man had very many flocks and herds; <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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."

<sup>5</sup> 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; <sup>6</sup> he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." <sup>7</sup> 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; <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.

At this point it became clear to David that he was very wrong. He had thought that because of his power and his fame and his pride that he deserved whatever he could take. But Nathan brought him up short and he could finally see that what he had done was reprehensible. "You have killed Uriah with the sword of the Ammonites."

Then David truly understands what he has done and is truly sorry. He says simply, "I have sinned against the Lord."

Now, consequences followed for David, as consequences do, but God forgave David. That is the point.

I have told you this story this morning to begin a discussion which will be one of my Lenten preaching themes; sin and repentance. Fun stuff. "Oh, I can see we're going to have a jolly time this Lent", you might think. It is a tough subject, but one that needs to be addressed at some time during the church year. Now is as good a time as any.

Most of us can say that although we are quite familiar with tales of greed and adultery and murder, this one about King David is probably not one that we personally identify with. But, if we are honest, we also will probably have to admit that we have at least committed one of the sins of which David is guilty, even if it is just the rather lesser sin of coveting something that does not belong to us.

Talk of sin may make us uncomfortable but one thing we can safely say is that we are all in this one together. There is no one in the room who can say that this subject does not pertain to them. We share a common problem. We all sin and fall short of the mark.

All of us, that is, except Jesus. I have heard the story of the temptation of Jesus, as you have, many times: For me it has been every Lent from the first time I began to attend church and was old enough to sit in the pew for the sermon. Give or take a few, I've probably heard 30 or more sermons on the Temptation of Christ. Mostly what I remember is the preacher telling us how great Jesus is. What a hero he is for being to withstand great hunger, thirst and exhaustion and then also withstand the temptations of power, and invincibility. I'm not sure that I have felt that I could identify with what Jesus went through. The temptations that I have been faced with in my life are not on the same scale as those that Jesus endured.

But what we can identify with, as could King David, is the temptation to rationalize what we have done. David thought that he deserved whatever he could take. Being king was difficult, after all. Jesus could have rationalized the temptation to make stones into bread. He would be able to feed the poor. He might have said, "I'm not doing this for myself, it's for all the hungry people I could help. And the second temptation Jesus might have rationalized that it would be good to be recognized as the Messiah. Everyone would see and understand. No longer would he have to contend with the Roman and the Jewish leadership not knowing who he was. Finally, Luke puts what he considers to be the most difficult temptation to withstand last. Jesus could have the opportunity to be safe from all future suffering. If he would just worship the Devil, he could have a "get out of jail free" card any time he needed it. I could certainly rationalize it, if someone came up to me and told me that if you just did "such and such" I would never, for the rest of my life, have to suffer any pain or grief. Think how much more I could work to help others if I didn't ever get sick or hurt or tired. The insidious thing about sin is that we have a built in rationalize that tells us that we, like King David aren't doing anything wrong. It sometimes takes another person to point it out to us.

But Jesus, although a man just like you and me, did not need two seconds to turn down the Devil. He was able to withstand temptation in a way that you and I cannot. Certainly King

David could not. The reason that Jesus is worshiped from that day until this one is because he was absolutely like the rest of us. And..... He was not at all like the rest of us. The Disciples knew it. The Gospel writers knew it. Paul knew it. And everyone who confesses with their lips that Jesus is Lord knows it too. We are very subject to temptation, we are very fallible. Jesus was not, and that is what saves us from ourselves. Jesus is the man who can wake us up from our rationalizing behavior.

Let me give you some food for thought over the next couple of weeks.

Question number one: What is sin? Is it the seven “deadlies” that have been taught for centuries in the Catholic Church; pride, greed, gluttony, envy, lust, anger and sloth? Or is it subtler than that?

Question number two: Where does sin come from? Does it come from within us? Does it come from other people outside of us who influence us or threaten us? The Devil is a convenient way of objectifying evil, and placing it outside of ourselves. “The Devil made me do it”, we say. Is there any truth in that.

We will tackle these questions over the next few weeks.

There are some of us who are more on the depressive side who will easily agree that we are sinful people and that there is not much help for us. And there are some, on the other end of the spectrum who feel as though they are fine just as they are, and find all this talk of sin unnecessarily gloomy. But what we **should** do, is find ourselves somewhere in the middle of this spectrum. We are probably not as sinful as King David, and we certainly are not sinless as Jesus Christ. We **are** people who do not always get things right, but do not always get things wrong either.

Lent is a time to draw up a balance sheet of what we have done on the plus side and on the minus side in the past year. This is the time to confess our sins and become ready to make amends for what we have done. And, most important, as our Old Testament reading from

Deuteronomy points out this morning, it is a time to be grateful for all that God has given us. We have all been wandering Arameans who have been brought home by the steadfast love, and saving grace of Jesus Christ.