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Emanuel's Lutheran Church, Pittsburgh (Bellevue), PA
3rd Sunday after Pentecost • June 13, 2010
2 Samuel 11:26 – 12:10, 13-15

Our Old Testament lesson is a story from the life of King David. We have all heard of him – he is famous in scripture for so many reasons. He was the shepherd boy whom God called to be Israel's first king. He took down the intimidating and strong Goliath. He was a musician, who is supposed to have written the songs that are in our book of *Psalms*. He was a powerful king and a successful warrior.

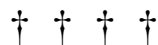
This great man, whom God loved and called, was far from perfect. What had he done? He used his power as king to take advantage of Bathsheba, a married woman. Her husband, Uriah the Hittite, was a faithful and dedicated fighter in the king's army. She later found out that she was pregnant, and only David could be the father. No paternity test was necessary.

David could have responded in various ways, many of which could have been more honorable. Instead, the great King David sent a thug to arrange for Uriah to be killed in battle.

It's so weird because King David had appeared to have it all. He was God's chosen and faithful king. He was successful in war. He had family and wealth. But we all know that appearances can be deceiving. It seems that some people's lives

have everything. We have all heard the stories of people, famous, or not-so-famous. A secret leaks out. And even those who seem perfect are human, just like us.

David got caught up with being a fairy tale, powerful King David – sort of like Ben Roethlisberger says he got caught up with being Big Ben. The way that everything unfolded, it appeared that David stopped even trying to live as a faithful Jew in the world. He broke several of the Ten Commandments: you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder. David’s life had spun out of control. He desperately needed to hear God’s voice.



So God sent the prophet Nathan. Nathan could have come at David, and told him how awful he had been. Instead, Nathan started with a story. He invited David to serve as a judge of others, as kings often did. After “David’s anger was greatly kindled,” (7:5) then Nathan pointed out the problem. “You are the man!” (2 Sam. 12:7) He didn’t get hot-headed. Nathan explained, cool as a cucumber.

“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.” (2 Sam 12:9)

David may have convinced himself that his actions were okay before. Not any more.

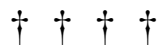


It can be startling for us to realize how messed up some of these biblical greats were. King David? The long-awaited, legendary King David? The distant relative of Jesus?

Our Bible stories are not a Who's Who of Exemplary Leaders – just like they aren't a science textbook. Scripture invites us to reflect on who God is and how God relates to us and the world. Through the prophet Nathan, God reminded David that there are some ways of living that are not faithful to God's hopes and will for humanity. Using power for evil purposes, having an intimate relationship with another's spouse, and conspiring to have someone killed – none of these reflect God's vision of love and life, in communion with God, our neighbors, and all of creation.

At different points in our lives, we all use our God-given freedom to choose paths that do not lead closer to God and God's ways. You or I may not have King David's list, but we have our own. There are some things that are hard for us to face. Often they are what we desperately want to forget are the cause of a deep sense of shame. It's hard to name them, because our sense of identity and self-worth takes a big hit. When faced with the facts, David confessed his sin, plain and simple. He didn't get defensive or blame anyone else.

What's most important about our scripture is that, God did not demand more than the simple confession. There was no quota for how dismal that David needed to feel. Even though murder seems like an awfully big sin (if there are "big" or "small" sins), God still offered forgiveness immediately. Nathan said, "Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die." (*2 Sam 12:13*) There were still consequences of his actions. The son that he had conceived with Bathsheba died. But David's life moved on. Bathsheba later bore their son, Solomon, who was a wise king who also left a legacy in Jewish history books.



We can spend our lives trying not to face the truth. We may not be kings or queens, but we are beautiful people, created in the image of God. At each of our cores, most of us know that we have problems – some of our choices are not wise or healthy or God-blessed. Our relationships with others and God often reflect the brokenness of human sin.

Each of us has been anointed as God's own, claimed in the waters of baptism, and marked with the cross of Christ forever. When (or if) we face ourselves truly, in our failings and our brokenness, we do so surrounded by the Spirit of God. With God's help, we are released from the burden of shame from our past. With God's

powerful healing, we are forgiven and made whole. We are released to seek and receive the full and faithful lives intended for us. What a gift!