

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

1st August 2021 - Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

II SAMUEL 11:26-12:14

GREAT FORGIVENESS

It has been billed and portrayed as one of the great love stories of all time, sort of the Biblical version of Romeo and Juliet. David, the shepherd boy who becomes king and is lonely at the top, despite his eight wives and numerous concubines, hooks up with Bathsheba, a young woman who had been forced into marriage with a much older man who cares more about his career as a soldier than he does about her. When we look at the main characters like this, the picture becomes one of two lost souls finally finding innocent love with each other. Why do we allow the facts to become twisted so that this is how we see this story? It could be because one of the characters is King David, writer of many Psalms, faithful follower of God and slayer of Goliath, one of the holy men of the Bible and history. Surely, he couldn't be guilty of such sins against God. Perhaps it's also because if we can cover up David's sin, like he tried to do, then we also have more of a chance of covering up and avoiding our own.

That picture of true love and innocence isn't really the one we are given in this Bible story. Instead, we have King David who is very different from the humble shepherd boy we were introduced to. He has changed. One night when he sees Bathsheba bathing, instead of looking away he keeps on looking. When he finds out she is married he still calls her to his bed. When she becomes pregnant, to cover up his sin he first lies and deceives, and then has her husband, an innocent man, killed. The same David who mourned over the death of Saul, a man who was trying to kill him, now after the death of Bathsheba's husband Uriah says, "Tell Joab to cheer up and not to be upset about what happened. You never know who will be killed in a war" (11:25). And then, as quickly as he can he takes Bathsheba into his palace and makes her his wife.

If we want proof that what David is doing isn't meant to be justified, we just need to look at how it is written. The most damning factor against him is that, while all of these things are happening, God is not mentioned once. In fact, God is not mentioned at all in chapter 11 until the very end. David; King, Psalm writer, holy man, has pushed God out of his life because he knows that what he is doing is wrong. So far has

God been pushed out that up to now David thinks he has gotten away with everything. But God is still there, and God is not happy.

When we read Bible stories like this one about King David, Judas betraying Jesus, Peter denying Jesus, it's easy for us to judge and condemn those people. When we do that, we're doing just what David did when the prophet Nathan came to him with the story about the poor man whose single lamb was stolen by his rich neighbour. David's response to that story was to condemn the man to death, until Nathan pointed out that the man was in fact, David. When we judge these people we do the same thing; we overlook our own sins and what we can learn from these stories. David fell into this sin because he had left God out of at least one part of his life. I wonder how many of us could say we don't, or never have done, the same thing. So let's, with open hearts and minds, have a closer look at David's experience and see how we can learn from these things for our own lives.

We know that at the end of this story, after he had confessed his sin and turned back to God, that David was forgiven completely and absolutely. I don't want to downplay that at all, in fact, it's what I want to finish up with, it's the most important bit. But God's forgiveness didn't take away the fact that David's sin had consequences, both for others and for himself. And we know that it's still the same for us.

Let's have a look first at the consequences of David's sin for others. Uriah died, David and Bathsheba's new born son died, the Israelites lost confidence in their King because of his public abuse of his power, and David's family ended up being torn apart by lust and violence. All the things Nathan predicted would happen, did.

Our actions affect others. We might try to cover that fact up, like David did, but it's still there. We might try to excuse our gossip saying it's only the sharing of information between friends, but it's still there working it's poison in our relationships. We might justify cheating our employer or the government because they will never miss what we take, but we know that when these losses add up we will all end up paying the cost. We might argue that things like selfishness, bitterness, hatred, aren't hurting anyone if we just keep them to ourselves, but they end up poisoning our relationships, even with those close to us. It's not always what we want to hear, but there is no sin we do which doesn't affect other people in some way.

And one problem with these sins is that they snowball. David looked at a woman he shouldn't have, then committed adultery with her, then killed a man. Our sins also, when we overlook them at the beginning, grow and cause more damage. Bitterness causes fights. Greed grows into stealing or deceit. Anger becomes abuse. Selfishness becomes neglect of the needs of those we should be caring for. We can't say that even our smallest sin hurts no one but ourselves. Not a truth we always want to hear, but one this story shows us so strongly.

The story of David also shows us that our sins hurt ourselves. Look at the transformation that putting God out of his life made in David. He wept at the death of King Saul, a man who was trying to kill him. But now, when he has Uriah killed, he just brushes it all off and takes Bathsheba to be his wife. Covering up produces callousness. As we continue to sin and justify what we are doing we become immune to our sin and its effects, or we think we do. Watching something inappropriate on TV becomes just harmless entertainment. Stubbornly insisting on our own way and opinion becomes sticking up for what's right. We need to always be on our guard, and honestly aware, of whether what we are doing is alright or something we need to stop doing.

Our sins also damage our relationship with God. Despite the fact he was a very godly man, in all his wrong dealings with Bathsheba David left God out of the picture. He had to, he knew that what he was doing was wrong. It's just like Adam and Eve in the garden trying to hide from God when they knew they had sinned. It's just like when we think we can hide from God when we don't want to face up to and confess what we have done. Adam and Eve couldn't hide, God came to them. God sent Nathan to see David and bring him back. God comes to us to because, whatever we have done, he doesn't want us to go away. How many people though have moved away from God because of their guilt over what they have done? They won't put it like that; they'll blame the church, or work pressures, family, or whatever. But deep down they know they have broken that relationship and they think it can't be repaired. We can each do the same thing in our own lives, as we try and take God out of those parts of our lives which we know aren't quite right. But of course this doesn't give us a healthy and close relationship with Him.

Each of us probably have stories from our own lives, or the lives of people close to us, which closely resemble this story of David; of how sin is so damaging to ourselves and others around us.

Despite all of this focus on sin and its consequences, our theme for today isn't 'Great Sin', but, 'Great Forgiveness'. In the face of all he'd done, when David finally owned up to his sin, Nathan said to him, 'God has forgiven you'. In Psalm 51 we read just how deep David's sorrow was, so what comforting words these must have been for him to hear, 'God has forgiven you'. They are the words we hear each Sunday as we confess our sins. They are the words we know God is saying to us when we confess our sins privately to him. When we read the Bible this is the message, the message of forgiveness which is said again, and again, and again. As we come to Holy Communion we hear, 'Take and eat, take and drink, my body, my blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins'. This story of David and Bathsheba gives us a good opportunity to examine ourselves, to look at our sins, to again consider the consequences our sin has on others and on ourselves. But it also helps to see just how great, how comforting, how total, God's forgiveness is. David was ready to condemn the rich man in Nathan's story. God is far more merciful and gracious than we are. Instead of condemning, He is always looking for the opportunity to forgive.

As great as David's sin was, God's forgiveness is even greater. As often as we sin, God's forgiveness is even more never-ending. We know that we are every bit as human as David was, that we fall to temptations both from within and without, and we can try to excuse or cover up these things. Thank God that through Jesus He has shown us just how great, and loving, and forgiving, He is. Living in His forgiveness, we can ask Him to help us to stay close to Him, and to always be seeking to follow Him. Amen.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/DISCUSSION:

- Are there any parts of your life which you are trying to keep away from God, to hide from Him? If so, confess them to Him knowing that you receive His forgiveness.
- Are there any temptations you are struggling to overcome, things you know you need to stop doing but feel you can't? If so, bring them to God and ask for His help to overcome them.
- Sometimes we can 'stay away' from God because we are worried we have done something which can't be forgiven. If this is the case for you or someone you know, bring it to God in prayer, knowing that He wants to offer forgiveness and bring all people back to Him.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
01.08 2021*