

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
"The Lord Gives Life to the Humble"
2 Samuel 12:1-13

So the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came and told him this:

"There were two men in a city. One was rich and one was poor. The rich man had a large number of flocks and herds. The poor man did not own anything except one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He raised it so that it grew up together with him and his children. It ate from his food and drank from his cup. It slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. When a traveler came to the rich man, the rich man was unwilling to take an animal from his flock or from his herd to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come from him. So he took the lamb from the poor man and prepared it for the man who had come to him."

David's anger flared up against that man. He said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this is as good as dead. In place of that lamb, he will restore four lambs, because he did this and had no pity."

Nathan told David, "You are the man. This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says.

"I anointed you king over Israel. I rescued you from the hand of Saul. I gave the house of your master to you, and I gave the wives of your master into your embrace. I gave you the house of Israel and the house of Judah. If this was too little, I would have added even more. Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in his eyes? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword. You have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. So now that sword will not depart from your house forever, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.

"This is what the LORD says. Look! I am raising up disaster against you from your own house. Right in front of your eyes I will take your wives and give them to your neighbor, and he will lie down with your wives in the sight of the sun. Because you acted in secret, I will do this in front of all Israel in broad daylight."

David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

Nathan said to David, "The LORD himself has put away your sin. You will not die."

Spring was the time for kings to fight. But this particular spring, King David sends his army out to fight. He stays behind. This could be called laziness, or even dereliction of duty, because in those days kings were expected to fight on the front with their soldiers. But David stays behind, and he gets in trouble. One night, walking on his roof of his palace, King David lays his eyes on a beautiful bathing woman named Bathsheba, on a roof across the way. It turns out the woman is married, with a husband off fighting David's battles. This is both lust and coveting another man's wife. For those keeping score at home, that's three sins. David calls Bathsheba into his bedchamber, and adds adultery to the list.

Bathsheba sends word to David that she is pregnant. David has to be the father, because her husband has been away fighting this whole time. David now tries to cover his tracks. He calls Bathsheba's husband home from the battlefields. David is hoping that while he is home, Bathsheba's husband will find comfort in her arms, and the world will be fooled into thinking the baby belongs to him and not David. Now we add lying and deception to laziness, lust, and adultery.

But Bathsheba's husband Uriah is too honorable for David's plan to work. Uriah refuses to sleep in his wife's bed while his fellow soldiers are fighting and dying. He sleeps outside, at the gate of the city, and everyone sees him there. David has tried to cover his sin with a lie, and didn't work. So now, things get even worse.

David commands his general to assign Bathsheba's husband to the front lines of the next battle. He falls in battle, just as David hopes. David murders him with the enemy's sword. Quickly, David snaps up Bathsheba and calls her his wife, so the world will never learn of his adultery. Laziness, lust, coveting, adultery, deception, and murder. If there were a category in the Guinness Book of World Records for "Most Sins in One Story," David might win it for this, challenged only by a couple other contenders in the book of Judges.

And there is one more that just might put him over the top. It's not stated explicitly during that part of the story, but listen carefully to a rebuke David receives later from the Lord's courageous prophet Nathan, who risks his life to confront David over his sin: **"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says.**

"I anointed you king over Israel. I rescued you from the hand of Saul. I gave the house of your master to you, and I gave the wives of your master into your embrace. I gave you the house of Israel and the house of Judah. If this was too little, I would have added even more. Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in his eyes?"

Why does the Lord feel the need to remind David that he – the Lord – is the One who did everything for David, who made him so great? Who needs a reminder that it's the Lord who makes them or breaks them? The proud. David has been spiritually proud throughout the story. Every other sin he commits in succession, one after another. But pride is there the whole time, driving all the other sins.

At no point does David stop and think, "Whoa. I've already been lazy. I should stop here and humble myself. I need to stop right now and repent. I need to confess this sin and plead for God's mercy and go no further." Nor does he stop and say, "Okay. Now I'm lusting, too. I need to stop now," or "Well, a child's come into the world. I need to come clean with Bathsheba's husband and with the Lord and with the world."

David's a mighty man. He's a great king. He's an amazing leader. He's a lady's man. He's crazy rich. And it has caused him to lift himself up in pride. And that's not just wrong, it's spiritual death. Because it stops David from confessing his sin and receiving God's forgiveness. Why should someone great stop and confess and amend? The great and mighty need nothing from anyone, not even forgiveness from God.

When Nathan arrives to confront David, it's not just a testimony to Nathan's bravery. It is also a testimony to God's love. Nathan tells the story of a rich man who selfishly robs his poor neighbor of the one thing he loves in life. And we should note what David says about the rich man in the story. It is a key sentence in the story: **David's anger flared up against that man. He said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this is as good as dead."** Unknowingly, of course, David has just condemned himself to death. Because he is the man. And he stole more than a little lamb from a man. He stole his wife and then his life. David deserves death far more than the man in the story.

And with Nathan's simple condemnation, **"You are the man,"** all of David's pride flees. Finally, he confesses. He does not list all his sins. He acknowledges them all very simply: **"I have sinned against the LORD."** And based on David's own assessment of the rich man in Nathan's story, what should the Lord do to David now?

Like the man in the story, he should die. But what happens next is beautiful. The prophet Nathan announces to David: **"The LORD himself has put away your sin. You are not going to die."** Notice Nathan does not make David sweat for a few days and then come back and announce God's forgiveness. Nor does he put conditions on the forgiveness: "Okay, David, God will forgive you...but first you have to donate a thousand shekels of gold to the temple" or "Okay, David, God will forgive you, but first you have to fast for a month." No, once David repents and confesses his sin God's forgiveness comes fast and free.

You might think you don't have a whole lot in common with King David. He is separated from us by 3,000 years and 10,000 miles, by language and culture. But all of us have at least one thing in common with David: pride. You may not be proud that you're rich, or that you're a king, or that the members of the opposite sex just can't stop looking at you, or that you're powerful. But we all have pride. The kind of pride that Christians today normally struggle with is more like the Pharisee's in Jesus' parable: "We're not like those people. I don't openly advocate for immoral behavior. I know the difference between a man and a woman. I know the Bible. I believe in God. Not like those people." We even direct our pride toward our fellow believers. "I go to church every Sunday. I give more than the rest." All these just different versions of the Pharisee's prayer.

And like David, our pride often sends us barreling into sin after sin, without ever feeling the need to pump the brakes, humble ourselves, and confess our sins to God. "I'm one of the good people. Why should I confess?"

But you are the man (or the woman). And so am I. So you've never murdered to cover up an affair. (At least I hope you haven't.) But we've all lusted in our hearts. And we've all lied to cover up mistakes. So you've never sent an army to fight without you. But you've been lazy with God's gifts. So you've never stolen a person. But you've stolen. And what does that leave us deserving from God? What did the man in Nathan's story deserve? What did David deserve for his pride and all his sin?

And this is precisely the truth God reveals in his Word. Our pride may lead to treat these sins as small, as needing no forgiveness. Our pride may lead us not to confess, and instead to fly freely from sin to sin. But our pride and all the sins it takes us into leaves us dead to God.

When David confessed his sin, the Lord did not pretend it never happened. That's not what the Lord does when we confess. He doesn't say, "Forget it. It was no big deal." No, our sin has happened and it is a big deal. The Lord teaches David the severity of sin with consequences that are extremely severe. David's power and prestige will never again return to the same level. And the Lord will take David and Bathsheba's child to heaven soon after birth.

But what does do with our sin? He does not ignore it or treat it as no big deal. Instead, he deals with it. He actively works to, in Nathan's words, put sin our sin himself.

The son born to Bathsheba and David will go home to heaven immediately. But David will have another Son. This Son will be called "the Son of David," the title of the Messiah. He will be David's Son and David's Lord, as well as ours. And his name will also be Jesus, because the Son of David comes to save us from our sin. He puts our sin away by humbling himself and coming to us with no trace of pride. He also lives without any other sins into which that pride leads. And he never confesses his sins, not because he is proud, but because he has none to confess.

This is how God puts away our sin. He sends the Son of David to be our righteousness. Then he puts our sin away by washing it away with Jesus' blood on the cross. He puts it away for each Christian personally in baptism, and again and again each time we commune.

David's Son, David's Lord, our Lord, our Savior, comes and puts our sins away. And God puts away the sin of each sinner who believes in him, and in faith confesses, "**I have sinned against the LORD.**"

The Lord himself has put our sin away. That is why the judgment David deserved – death – passed by. And that same judgment passes by us. We will not die, either. Even when our bodies die, we will live in heaven. And our bodies will not die forever, but will rise in glory like our Savior's.

The Lord has put away our sin. And we will not die.

That truth is life. It's also an invitation. We have a Lord who puts away all sin for all who believe. We have an open invitation to confess all sin, any sin, any time, every time. An open invitation to confess the sin in which we are born, the sin we commit and the good we omit, even the sin we are unaware of. And if you know what God's answer is, why would you ever hesitate? Why would bound from sin to sin in pride thinking you're one of the good ones who doesn't need to confess?

You wouldn't. You won't. Not when you know what your sin deserves. Not when you know what the Lord has done to put your sin away. Not when you know that answer to your confession is life. Without pride, with full humility, you will say, "**I have sinned against the LORD.**" And you will hear him answer: "**I myself have put away your sin. You will not die.**" Amen.