

## YOU ARE THE ONE

A Message by the Rev. Joyce L. J. Lawson

2 Samuel 11:1-5, 14-17, 26-27  
2 Samuel 12:1-7a, 13-15

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David was one of Israel's great heroes of faith. In fact, he may have been one of the greatest kings of all time. As a teenager, he proved his fearlessness when he chose to stand up to and fight huge armor clad Goliath, with only a sling and a small rock. David went on to become a brilliant military strategist as well as a city planner. He basically built Jerusalem and made it the capital of Israel. He united the entire kingdom of Israel under his rule. And if that wasn't enough, the Bible tells us that he was handsome, had beautiful eyes, and also an artistic side. He was both a musician and a composer of songs; his psalms have endured throughout the centuries.

In 1 Kings 15:5 it is revealed how David went down in history. The verse reads, "David did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." David was known for his faithful devotion and service to God, and God blessed him because of that devotion and service. But, there was that one dark, dark blot on his record.

In today's lesson from 2 Samuel we learned that Uriah the Hittite was a loyal soldier in David's army. He was also the husband of beautiful Bathsheba, whom David happened to see bathing one day while he was walking on the roof of his palace. David took one look at Bathsheba and decided that he had to have her. He sent his messengers to bring her to him and before long she sent him back the message that she was pregnant. At that point, David's strategical mind went into high gear. He came up with a plan to get himself out of the big mess he had gotten himself into.

If David could get Uriah and Bathsheba to spend a romantic weekend together, Uriah might believe the child was his own. Well, David ordered Uriah back to Jerusalem and told him to go see his wife. But there was a problem, soldiers were sworn to celibacy until the battle was over and the battle was still going on. Uriah being the honorable man he was didn't feel right about spending a night with his wife when his fellow soldiers were still fighting. Instead, Uriah spent the night outside the king's house on the cold, hard ground. The next day, David once again tried to talk him into going home. David assured him that as a faithful soldier Uriah deserved a night at home with his wife. But the same thing happened. David was desperate, so he decided to invite Uriah to supper and get him drunk. But even a drunk Uriah refused to go home.

Worn out and frustrated by Uriah's loyalty, David changed his strategy. He wrote a letter to Joab, the commander of his army; it was a letter that loyal Uriah delivered himself. The letter said, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die." (2 Samuel 11:15) What the king ordered was exactly what happened, and Uriah became a casualty of war. Of course, it was Uriah's own fault since David had given him every encouragement and opportunity to spend a night with his wife.

We humans are experts at justifying our behavior to ourselves and others. We rather easily come up with good reasons why something is not our responsibility, not our fault. When necessary, we even cover-up our sin. But David's story reminds us that God sees and knows all. Sometimes it may seem that those in positions of leadership and power get away with more than common folks, but that's not

necessarily true. Nowadays, public figures are so closely scrutinized that past transgressions often come back to haunt them. And of course, the truth is that sinful behavior catches up with all of us, no matter who we are. None of us is morally autonomous; what we do affects God and others as well as ourselves. And so our story continues.

After Uriah was killed in battle, Bathsheba, mourned him, and when the appropriate amount of time for mourning was over she became David's wife and she gave birth to a son. "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:1) and soon after the baby was born, the prophet Nathan came knocking at the front door of the palace.

Nathan's confrontation strategy was pure genius – his approach was not direct like a fire and brimstone preacher, instead he came in through the back door by telling a story. Why did he take such an indirect route? Well, a direct confrontation would have likely put David on the defensive. He would have been so busy defending and justifying his behavior, he would have refused to see and accept responsibility for what he had done. Also, Nathan wanted to do something much more profound than condemn David. Nathan wanted to revive David's conscience and restore his sense of justice. He wanted Israel to have the kind of king she was supposed to have instead of a handsome former hero who had become corrupted by the power he had allowed to go to his head. If David could clearly see what he had become, if he could actually pronounce judgment on himself then the impact would be so much greater than if Nathan did it for him.

So Nathan told David a story, knowing well that we human beings are more likely to drop our defenses when listening to a story about someone else. When words are not aimed right at us, we often listen better because our defenses don't get in the way. In fact, hearing about someone else's bad behavior often makes us feel even better about ourselves. And that is exactly what happened to David when Nathan told him about the rich man with his many flocks and the poor man with nothing but one little ewe lamb. When the rich man stole the poor man's sheep, David immediately rushes to the poor man's defense and pronounces a death sentence on the rich man.

"You are the man!" said Nathan, and in that moment David's heart was split in two as he recognized his behavior for what it was. "I have sinned against the Lord," (2 Samuel 12:13) he said – not because Nathan had told him so but because he recognized it for himself. It was in that moment of honest acknowledgment and repentance that David began his return to the Lord, his return to life. Technically, it shouldn't have been. David had broken three of the Ten Commandments – thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not covet, thou shalt not kill. In those days, death was often the punishment for breaking just one commandment. David confessed his guilt and as he did so, he condemned himself to death according to the law of that day. But death was not what God had in mind for him.

"The Lord has put away your sin," Nathan told him. God has forgiven you, so "You shall not die." (2 Samuel 12:13) That was the good news. The bad news was that the child would die, because in conceiving him David had utterly turned his back on the Lord. I think this is the hardest part of the story for us that a child should die for his father's sins. This is not something I know how to explain very well. However, there is a basic Biblical understanding that while God has given us the freedom to decide how we will live, God has also set boundaries on that freedom. There are moral limits we trespass at our own risk. We are free to keep going – people do it all

the time – but there are consequences, and consequences are different than punishment.

If you drop a stone out a window, it will fall to the ground and it might hit someone. If you drink alcohol before you drive, your responses will be impaired and an accident is more likely to occur. If you conceive a child, try to pawn it off on another man, then make the child's mother a widow, the child is bound to suffer. Because it is the will of God? Yes, that's a hard one. All I know is that we live in a web of relationships with God, with one another, and with all of creation that responds to the choices we make. When we exercise our freedom in life-giving ways, we are told that even the trees clap. And when we exercise it in death-producing ways, the earth quakes beneath our feet. The thing is, the society in which we all live keeps telling us that we are independent and self-made, therefore, when we make decisions we need only to consider what's best for me – let that other person do what's best for him or her. But those thoughts are not biblical, they are not God's thoughts for none of us is morally autonomous – what we do does not affect just us.

After experiencing and acknowledging the consequences of our sinful actions then God gives us the opportunity to turn back to him. And if we are fortunate enough to feel our hearts split in two, then we may find that even the death sentence we have pronounced upon ourselves is lifted from us by a loving and gracious God. From the moment we know we have sinned and say so out loud, God can then help us find our way back to him.

Things were never the same for David after "the matter of Uriah the Hittite." He buried his firstborn son, and he acquired an unfavorable reputation that stuck with him. There were lasting consequences that he lived with for the rest of his life, but the point is he lived. God took him back, and he once again found blessing in faithful service to God. David and Bathsheba had a second son named Solomon who ruled Israel for forty years with great wisdom, and David's line survived to produce a boy named Jesus.

Was David a good man or a bad man? You decide. I think he was both, as most of us are also both good and bad. If we remember him as a hero, I hope it is not because of Goliath, or his many war stories. I hope it's because of that moment when he was able to see himself honestly and admit his sinfulness. I believe that moment of repentance was a dramatic turning point, because if David had not admitted his sinfulness, it would have likely been time for God to choose another King for Israel. After all, David had been chosen to replace King Saul when Saul began to see himself as above God's law. David's true strength and I believe legacy is seen in his ability to humble himself before God and admit his sinfulness. This is something that many of us humans have a very hard time doing.

In all honesty, there are likely some good stories that could be told about each one of us and our own bad behavior. How would you respond if someone like Nathan pointed his finger at you and said, "You are the One!" Being caught is a scary thought, but it happens all the time whether we admit it or not. With God, you and I cannot get away with anything. Avoidance is only fooling ourselves and cover-up is a practice in futility.

But when you and I are able to drop our self-justifications, and see ourselves for who we are and our actions for what they are, then we are assured that God will forgive us. Yes, there may be consequences as a result of our sinfulness, but God will bring forth new life from a place where there was only crippling sin and death. In fact, God will even give us the opportunity to once again serve and honor him. All I can say and perhaps you might want to join with me in saying, "thank God!"

Let us pray,

Oh God, time and time again you have shown us the way through sin and death to new and abundant life. During this time of Lent, we are especially mindful and thankful for the powerful way your abundant mercy and amazing grace was revealed to us through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.