

Forgiven sinners June 17, 2007 Yr C, Proper 6, Pent 3: Anne-Marie Jeffery
[Samuel 11:26-12:10, 13-15](#) & [Psalm 32](#);
[Galatians 2:15-21](#); [Luke 7:36-8:3](#);

In seminary in our Bible classes, one of the ways we were tested on our knowledge of the Bible was to identify where certain verses came from. We didn't have to quote exact scripture and verse – you see it was an Episcopalian seminary- but we did have to know what book it came from, what the story was and who was speaking. Our Old Testament professor was fond of telling us how one particular phrase was often mis-identified. The phrase was, “You are the man”. Some students would attribute that phrase to what God said to Noah when he told him to build an ark and fill it with two of each animal. Others said it was what God said to Moses when he called him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Some students even went to the New Testament - even though it was an Old Testament class - saying that it was what John the Baptist said to Jesus when he first saw him.

However, if you were listening to our Old Testament reading, you'll know that the phrase, “You are the man” comes from the reading from Second Samuel which we just heard. In our Scripture reading David, King of Israel, God's chosen one, has done something that is very bad. He saw Bathsheba, a beautiful woman, bathing and he took her for himself even though she was the wife of Uriah, one of his soldiers and she gets pregnant. David then sent Uriah to the front line of the war where he would most likely be killed and he is. After a time of mourning, David takes Bathsheba to be one of his wives.

It is an understatement to say that God is not pleased with these happenings. God sends the prophet Nathan to tell King David a story - a story about a rich man and a poor man. The rich man has many sheep and lambs, but the poor man only has one lamb which he worked hard to buy. The lamb eats at the table of the poor man and drinks from his cup. The poor man cuddles the lamb to his bosom and the lamb is like one of his family. One day the rich man had a traveler who stopped in and whom he really didn't want to serve. So instead of using one of the sheep or lambs from his large flock, he takes the poor man's lamb and serves it to his guest. It is a terrible story.

When we start to think about it, it tears at our hearts. Visions of the poor man and his family watching as their lamb is taken away run through my head.

The story tore at David's heart when he heard it, and he demanded to know who that rich man since he felt he deserved to die. Nathan responds, “You are the man. You are the one who struck down Uriah and have taken his wife. The sword shall never depart from your house.” David realizes what he has done. All of a sudden his sin becomes clear. He is no longer blinded by lust or whatever else kept him from seeing how terrible what he was did was. The curtain has been pulled back and now he sees clearly. And I have got to hand it to David because he doesn't make excuses or soften what he has done. He says, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And what is really amazing is that the very next thing that Nathan says to David is that “The Lord has put

away your sin.” David is forgiven. David has a price to pay – his child with Bathsheba will die and that is a terrible price, but David is forgiven.

I find myself wondering how David ended up in such a place? How did David, God’s chosen one, who probably wrote the Psalms, the father of the royal bloodline that Jesus was born into, do such a terrible sin? What happened? We don’t really know. David was human like the rest of us. David probably was tempted, was overcome by desire and did some rationalization. Before he knew it, he was having an affair with someone else’s wife and arranging the death of one of his soldiers. But this is the way of sin.

Sin sneaks into our lives – even the lives of those of us who are working hard to do God’s work and be righteous. When we are tempted it is often not as we would think. We are usually on the look out for the usual things – lying, theft or murder, but sometimes sins, even the obvious ones, sneak in disguised by circumstance or by great desire, and we find ourselves caught up in them – ashamed and distraught - perhaps finding ways to rationalize what we have done. If we are lucky, we come to see what we have been doing wrong - whether it is through circumstance or through someone else. The curtain in front of our eyes is drawn back and we become very aware of what we have done. At this moment of realization, we can come before the God and say we have sinned and that we have done wrong. It is then that we can receive that forgiveness that God offers – that God has waiting for us. It is then that we can receive the love of God into our hearts and be truly healed,

It is hard to see our sin. It was hard for David until Nathan came along, and it was hard for the Pharisee in our Gospel reading this morning. This Pharisee, Simon, who has invited Jesus over for a meal has no idea that he is a sinner. After all he is a Pharisee, a devout scholar of the law, and a respected person in the society of the time. He doesn’t see his sin of not fully welcoming Jesus with his scant hospitality, or how he uses his morals to keep him from seeing inside his heart. The Pharisee is busy pointing fingers at the woman who is washing Jesus’ feet with her tears and anointing them with ointment wondering how Jesus can allow this woman to touch his feet and how Jesus cannot know about her sin? But Jesus knows her sin as does the woman. She is in a place where she is ready to admit her sin and receive forgiveness. She is in a place where her heart is open to receive God’s love and she is transformed.

We are all sinners. Jesus says to all of us “You are the man” or “You are the woman.” You are a sinner. But Jesus also says to us that we are forgiven. Can we accept that forgiveness? Can we grasp this amazing gift of God? We are “forgiven sinners”, but that does us no good if we cannot acknowledge our sin and let God’s forgiveness and love into our hearts. God invites us to acknowledge our sin. God knows what we have done and are doing. And even so, God forgives us and loves us. But for us to be truly free of our sin and accept that love of God, we must recognize the sinfulness in our lives. We must open our hearts to God. When we can recognize the sin ourselves, we can then let the love into those parts so we can be healed and know that we are truly forgiven.

It is not so much about our doing but about our receiving. When David says, “Yes you are right. I have done a great wrong”, it is then that he can receive God’s forgiveness. When the woman who comes into the Pharisees house, kneels at Jesus’ feet crying, and lays down her sin, she receives Jesus’ forgiveness and goes in peace with God’s love in her - transformed.

Now how do you go about getting to that place where that transformation can occur? It takes some looking at yourself and your life. It may involve examining that small nagging piece inside yourself that has been saying – how you are living hasn’t been quite right. It may take someone coming up to you – a stranger or a friend who says – do you see what you are doing? It may come to you in prayer. It may come to you as you ask God to help you see your sin. As one sermon writer put it, “Our sinfulness is as unique as our personality. Usually, we are simply working with a laundry list of deeds or thoughts that we know are wrong. What God wants to do is deal with a deep personal pattern – we might say, “the tapestry of our sin.” We must pray that God would reveal to us the mystery of our personal pattern, the deep-seated, consistent recurrence of pride, envy, lust, or whatever has a hold over us.”¹ We pray to get to that place where we to say – I have sinned against the Lord.

And yes when we get to that place, there may be consequences in our acknowledgement of sin– loss of job, loss of relationship, loss of money and more, but in our acknowledgement the healing will begun – in our hearts and in our lives. Our awareness of sin in our lives is a continual process, but God is willing to renew us again and again even as we slip down a different slope and get caught up in something else that takes us away from God. So you forgiven sinners out there - Listen up. God is issuing you an invitation – an invitation to acknowledge your sin and open yourself up to transformation through Gods love and forgiveness so we all like the woman at Jesus’ feet will be sent forth in peace transformed and healed by God’s love.

¹ The Rev. Barry Turner, St. Stephen's, San Luis Obispo, California,
http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons_that_work_86672_ENG_HTM.htm.