

True Confession
2 Samuel 11:1-26
July 28, 2024
Conklin

An old man was sitting in church, reflecting on his life. After the service, the pastor asked him how he was doing.

The old man replied, "Well, I'm trying to live by the Ten Commandments, but I've got to admit, I'm not perfect."

The pastor asked, "How many of the commandments do you keep?"

The old man thought for a moment and said, "I think I'm doing pretty well. I've managed to keep nine out of ten."

The pastor smiled and said, "Nine out of ten isn't bad!"

The old man chuckled and said, "That's what I thought too, until I realized the one I'm missing is 'Thou shalt not covet!'"

It could be worse. It could be one of the other, you know, big ones he was struggling with. Adultery. Murder. Today we have both. I told you 2nd Samuel was like a paperback beach read.

The verse doesn't start out good. 2 Samuel 11 tells us "But David remained at Jerusalem." That is not a good sign. Kings are supposed to go out to battle. "But David remained at Jerusalem." You know it isn't going to be good with an introduction like that.

This is David, the little guy with the rock, now facing a Giant of his own making. How do we reconcile that David, the man after God's own heart, and David, the sexual abuser and murderer, are the same person?

It is about as far from good as it can get. Some argue that this is the beginning of the end of David. This event, this abuse of power, is where David's decline was launched. There was bad

decision after bad decision following this dalliance on the roof of the palace. The king, who is still held out as the pinnacle of the royal experiment, is revealed to be as human, as much of a sinner in need of redemption as any of us.

“If you mess, up, fess up”. We tell it to our children, our students all the time. Take responsibility for our actions.

One scholar admonishes: There have been attempts throughout history to exonerate David by laying the blame at the feet of Bathsheba. She was simply too beautiful, too available, too accessible, and visible to resist. David was helpless before her power. It is clear where the power is here. The writer is careful to explain Bathsheba’s behavior. It is David’s behavior that is being challenged here.

When Bathsheba sent word to the king that she was pregnant, the king continued his sinfulness. Continued? Expanded, compounded, made impossibly worse. First, he tries to cover up this wanton act, and when that doesn’t work, he plots murder against an innocent man, a faithful, patriotic man who honored his king and his country, while defending the purity of his wife.

So honorable is this man that his name is preserved in the genealogy of Jesus that Matthew records. How many biblical figures can that be said about? The offense against Bathsheba and Uriah is laid bare for all to see.

What do we do with this story? Yet, here we are, in second Samuel, reliving a story that makes us all uncomfortable. We don’t even get the rest of the story until next week.

I confess, I don’t know myself. What to do with it here this morning. I confess that I don’t know myself, either, and according to many of theologians before us, that is the nature

and the need at the heart of “bearing” our souls. There may be as many quotes about confession

The confession of evil works, is the first beginning of good works. Augustine

As we examine the various parts of worship then, we move from greeting and gathering to “the unison prayer of confession”. It doesn’t always have to be confession, to be honest. It’s in the Communion ritual, isn’t that enough?

We return to worship, and we hear a call to confession. No one particularly likes the prayer of confession in worship, admittedly. Most of us who lead worship have been asked, sometimes directly sometimes more indirectly, if it would be possible to just skip it most of the time.

When Pastor Angela returned to using the “from the book” communion, some people in the congregation were miffed. They didn’t think of themselves as “bad people”. “The prayer sometimes has us saying things that we feel aren’t true.

“We have not done your will, we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, and we have not heard the cry of the needy” (“Confession and Pardon,” *United Methodist Hymnal*, 8).

Rev. Dr. Derek Weber puts it this way. *“Isn’t that a bit much? We are a loving community; we pay attention to and are engaged in missions with the needy. Why do we need to beat our chest and claim that we are not doing this when we are? Worship is supposed to be a happy experience; I am supposed to feel better about myself when I come out of worship, not worse. Let’s just skip over the whole confession thing.”*

Except. We do gather each week with regrets. Maybe not on David’s scale; we haven’t arranged a murder to cover up an adulterous affair. But we have, on occasion, wounded those we love with unkind words or hurtful acts. We have walked or driven

past someone seeking something from us and pretended we didn't see them, when, in fact, we did, but we have felt helpless in the face of the systems of poverty in our hometowns.

We come carrying burdens that sometimes feel overwhelming to us, and when all we do is set them aside while we sing praises to God, we walk away with those same burdens, same guilt, same sin. That is why we need confession. Even when the words of the corporate prayer don't quite mirror our personal experience, there is space to offer our own prayers.

Confession is an act of honesty and courage—an act of entrusting ourselves, beyond sin, to the mercy of a loving and forgiving God. Pope John Paul II

When we bring our whole selves to worship, a lot comes along with us.

In failing to confess oh Lord, I would only hide you from myself, not myself from you.

There are, we have been taught to say, things done and things left undone that weigh on us. Here is where we can offer all that up to the God who loves us. Here is where we can find absolution, forgiveness, and blessing that allows us to start over again and seek to be who we want to be, who God calls us to be.

Every day my conscience makes confession relying on the hope of Your mercy to be trusted more than its own innocence. Augustine

I think this final illustration, which was used in the service for the object lesson, is a wonderful way to close our thoughts:

In a small village, a skilled weaver created beautiful tapestries that were highly prized for their intricate patterns and vibrant

colors. One day, the weaver's young apprentice, eager to learn, was given the task of weaving a new tapestry for a special occasion.

As the apprentice worked diligently, he accidentally spilled a pot of red dye on the tapestry. The once-pristine cloth was now marred with a large, unsightly stain. Panicked and devastated, the apprentice thought his mistake was irreparable and considered abandoning his work altogether.

When the weaver returned and saw the stained cloth, he could tell the apprentice was distraught. Instead of reprimanding him, the weaver gently asked, "What happened?"

The apprentice confessed, "I spilled dye on the cloth, and now it's ruined. I'm so sorry."

The weaver smiled and said, "Let me show you something." He took the stained cloth and began to work on it with skillful hands. Over the course of several days, the weaver incorporated the stain into the design, turning it into a part of the tapestry's pattern. The once-mistaken dye now became a vibrant feature, enhancing the tapestry's beauty and uniqueness.

When the apprentice saw the final result, he was amazed. The tapestry, with its once-disastrous stain, was now even more beautiful and intricate than before.

The weaver explained, "Confession is like this stained cloth. When we admit our mistakes and seek forgiveness, we allow God to take what is broken and incorporate it into a larger, more beautiful design. Our flaws and failures, when confessed and accepted, can become part of a greater work of grace."