
My Sermon from Sunday August 1, 2021, '10th Sunday after Pentecost' ~

"The Truth in Love"

I speak to you in the name of our God of truth, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

"Speak the truth in love," the apostle Paul writes (Ephesians 4:17). For many years, I have tried to live by these words written by St. Paul. He was writing to Christians in Ephesus, literally begging them to lead worthy lives in the unity of the Spirit of God. He reminded them that there is ***"one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all."*** (Ephesians 4:5-6).

To speak the truth is one thing. To speak the truth in the **agape love of God** is entirely different. And that is exactly what the prophet Nathan did when he pointed out the sin of King David. David had an affair with a married woman named Bathsheba. She had no choice in the relationship. You don't say 'NO' to a King. David then compounded his sin. He arranged for Bathsheba's husband Uriah to be killed in battle. Then David took Bathsheba as one of his wives. Multiple marriages were the norm in those days.

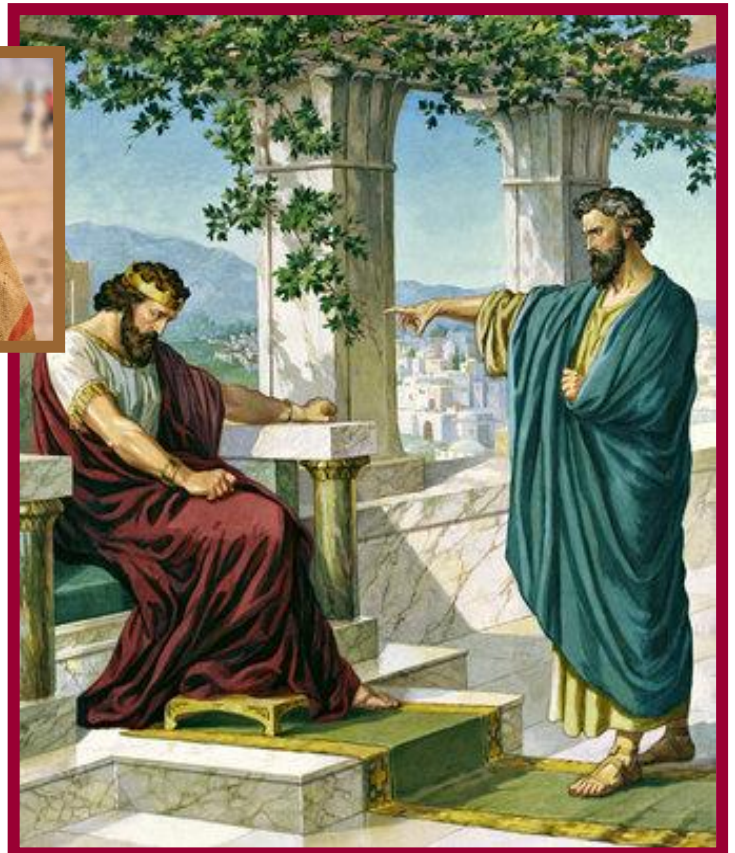
A couple of weeks ago, our Old Testament scripture focused on Nathan and his courage in telling David not to build a temple in Jerusalem. In our scripture for today from the 12th chapter of the 2nd Book of Samuel, the 10th Sunday after the Day of Pentecost, we read another episode involving Nathan speaking the truth in love. Nathan knew that the Lord was unhappy with David's adultery with Bathsheba and with David's arrangement to put Uriah at the front of the battle so he would be killed. Uriah was an honourable man who put loyalty to king and country first.

Nathan alerts David to his sin by telling David a story. Nathan tells the story of a rich man and a poor man. The rich man had many flocks of sheep and the poor man had only one little lamb whom he loved and treated like his child. This little sheep became his best friend and the man would eat and sleep with the ewe. Then one day, the rich man needed a sheep for a feast and he did not wish to take one of his own sheep so he took the poor man's beloved sheep. He had the sheep killed, cooked and eaten.

What is David's reaction to this story? David is horrified and believes that the rich man deserves to die and needs to make compensation to the poor man by giving him several sheep.

Nathan, speaking the truth in love, informs David about his sin of adultery and arranged murder. David realizes the depth of his transgressions against God and cries out:

"I have sinned against the Lord." (2 Samuel 12:13)



David could have had a very different reaction. He could have said, *“Nathan, you did it again. First you said I couldn’t build a temple and now you are accusing me of a sin. I could have you arrested for your words.”*

Instead, David, in a spirit of humility and repentance, listens to Nathan and trusts his words spoken in truth and in love.

God forgives David. Our psalm for this morning is Psalm 51, which is David’s act of confession and penitence. Here is what 17th century English priest and Bible commentator **Matthew Henry** wrote about this psalm:

“Psalm 51 is the most eminent of the penitential psalms and most expressive of the cares and desires of a repenting sinner.”

In the psalm, David acknowledges his sinfulness and asks God for forgiveness. David is acutely aware of what he has done and cries out to God:

“For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me.”

David then asks for forgiveness and promises that he will teach others about the forgiving power of God. David prays for the grace to proclaim God’s praise:

“Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.”

Then why do we uphold David and refer to him, in the words of the prophet Ezekiel as the ‘Shepherd King’? The reason is clear.

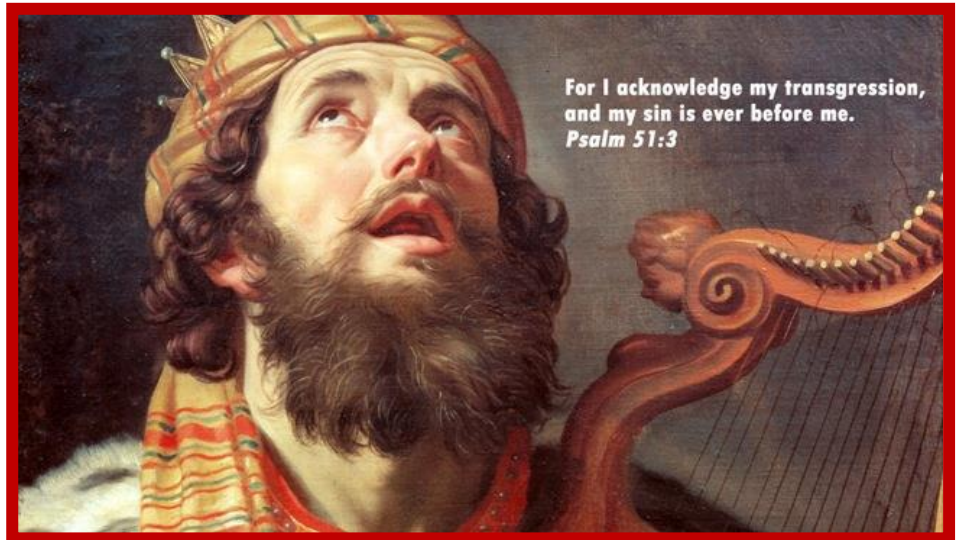
David loves God. Remember how he danced with all of his might and with joy when the Ark of the Covenant was brought into Jerusalem.

David is an imperfect person just like you and me. **David has the gift of examining himself and of acknowledging his faults, his actions, and the damage that he has caused** to others.

It is when we know our own flaws that we can then ask God for forgiveness. Not everyone is able to go into their hearts and to look at their shortcomings. Some people can go through their entire life without ever saying *“I have sinned against the Lord.”* Either they don’t think they have done anything wrong, or they don’t realize how serious it has been, or they can’t go into their own pain.

David gives us a model of the courage it takes to be real and to be truthful. David knew that true forgiveness comes from our loving God. **If we are willing to acknowledge “our sins in thought, word, and deed by what we have done or by what we have left undone”** (from the ‘General Confession’), God is there right beside us to bless us, and to forgive us, and to teach us.

David accepted the words of Nathan and did not push back against them. Sometimes when we are given a realistic assessment as to how we are doing, we push back and stop listening.



It is so much easier to say:

- *“I am not responsible. It wasn’t my fault,” Or*
- *“It wasn’t the clergy abusing the children. It was the night watchmen,” Or*
- *“I didn’t even know what was going on,” Or*
- *“They didn’t mind.” . . .*

When someone you trust speaks the truth in love, listen to them. Then do what needs to be done to grow in grace, to make amends, and to change your thoughts and your actions as needed.

When we have Jesus in our heart, we are given the strength to examine ourselves. The day after Jesus fed the 5,000 with the miracle of the loaves and the fishes, the people came searching for Jesus because they wanted another miracle. Jesus spoke the truth in love and told them that the very best bread gives life to the world.

“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never thirst.” (John 6:35)

Jesus feeds us with the bread of his life and sustains us by this true and living bread.

Amen.

Archdeacon Deborah+

