

SOMETIMES YOU LOSE YOUR WAY

**Sermon: June 13, 2010
Third Sunday after Pentecost**

Texts: Psalm 32; 2 Samuel 11:26 – 12:10, 13-15; Galatians 2:15-21; Luke 7:36 – 8:3

At the center of our Old Testament reading is the greatest king that the nation of Israel had ever known. His name is David. His was a “rags to riches” story. He was born into a shepherding family in rural countryside. But there was something about him that made him stand out above the other young men in his community. He was a man of great beauty and confidence. He spoke with eloquence and even enjoyed writing and playing music, not the typical characteristic of young men living in a shepherding community.

In spite of his humble beginnings he was catapulted into a political career. He burst onto the scene when he confronted the giant Goliath and helped to defeat the Philistine army. He was so successful in nearly everything he did that he was perceived to be a threat to those in power. But he met all the right people, made all the right moves, and eventually defeated those in power. He rose to rule over a nation at the height of its power. His influence was felt throughout the Middle East.

However, his transition from the shepherd boy who confronted the giant into the man who became king was not a smooth one. As he rose to power, he forgot where he came from and how he got there. Most of all, he forgot the importance to being faithful to God. As a result, David’s dark side began to emerge. The primary example of this dark side is found in the story of David and Bathsheba. It is a story of lust and deceit.

Though married, another woman catches David’s eye. He views her from afar standing on a rooftop. He is so taken in by her beauty that he asks his advisors who she was. They told him that she was the wife Uriah, soldier in one of King David’s elite military forces.

The fact that she is married doesn’t matter to David. After all, he is the King. So he devises a plan in which she would be brought to him in his secret chambers and there he engages in an intimate relationship with her. Nobody but his advisors would have known about the affair, except for one major problem; the woman becomes pregnant with his child.

Suddenly David and his advisor have a crisis on their hands. Soon people would know that the child this woman was carrying was not her husband’s since Uriah was away on a lengthy military campaign. They would soon ask questions as to who was the father. As popular as King David was, there was no way the public would have continued to support his leadership since part of his popularity was based not only on his political and military leadership, but also on his moral and ethical leadership. David was known to them as an honorable man, faithful to his

people and faithful to God. The basis of his popularity would certainly take a major hit if the people were to discover that David has abused his power by forcing this woman into an illicit sexual relationship resulting in an unwanted pregnancy.

So David and his advisors come up with a plan, one which would bring Uriah back from the war. Surely, after months away from his beautiful wife, this soldier would certainly want to be with her. No one would be surprised then if his wife announced her pregnancy after this visit. If this plan were to succeed, then the public would never have to know about the leader's indiscretion.

Their plan comes unraveled, however, when Uriah comes back but chooses not to be with his wife. It isn't that he didn't love her. It's just that the soldiers had this code when they were in the midst of battle. Why should he as a commander of the king's elite forces have a benefit that his fellow soldiers would not?

So King David and his advisors come up with another plan. Maybe if they got him drunk, he would forget about this code of honor and visit his wife. This plan also fails.

So they devise a third plan. They would send the soldier back to the war and ordered that he be sent to the front lines, where he was likely to be killed. This time the plan worked.

So King David now had the perfect cover-up. As the nation mourns the loss of a great soldier, David takes the soldier's wife into his home and her as one of his wives.

David may have believed that he had fooled the public and held off his political adversaries. But his sin would not go un-noticed or unpunished by God. For the Lord God is well aware of David's sin and scriptures say that what David had done displeased the Lord.

Now the Lord is clearly displeased with all sin, but the sin of King David must have especially grieved the Lord. For David was clearly blessed by God. He gave David many gifts through which he inspired and led God's people. He was gifted with great courage, the ability to speak in public, a charismatic personality, great beauty and he was a man of great faith. Under the Lord's guidance, he was chosen by God to lead the Israelites in battle against the Philistines and then become an advisor to Judah's first king, Saul. When Saul fell from God's favor, David was anointed by God to be Israel's second king. It was during the reign of King David that Judah and Israel were consolidated into one great nation, and Jerusalem became the capital of the nation. It was also during David's reign that the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem, establishing the city as both the political and the religious center of the people. Clearly God was pleased with everything David had done to this point and bestowed many blessings upon him.

So what should the Lord do? What would be a fitting punishment for David's great offense against God and against the people of Israel? Should he lose his office? Should he undergo a great and humiliating public trial? Should he be imprisoned for conspiracy, treason and murder? Should he receive the death penalty for David's betrayal of his own royal guard?

None of these things happen. David goes on to serve as King for many years. Not only does he take Bathsheba as his wife, one of their sons would go on to succeed him as King. The son's name was Solomon.

David, however, has to live with the consequences of his betrayal of trust. He will experience grief at the death of the child born of the adulterous affair. He will experience the shame of having his own wives engage in affairs with other men. He will know the pain of betrayal by some of his own family members, including his sons Ammon and Absalom.

We must be clear. This isn't really a story about the betrayal of public trust. This is a story about sin against God. David, blessed by God, turns his back on God. He betrays his relationship with his Lord. It is God, and only God, who can determine what the consequence is when one sins against the Lord.

Our lessons for today tells us that David, when confronted by Nathan, confesses this sin before the Lord, appeals to God's mercy, and waits for whatever punishment consequence may come his way. The Lord show his merciful side when he welcomes David back into relationship with him and continues to bless him. That is why we know more about the goodness of King David rather than his sinfulness.

And ultimately this is not so much a story about King David as it is a story about God. Time and time again, throughout the scriptures, God reveals the depths of his radical love, over and over again forgiving the sinner – no matter what the sin. God's love is radical, because it far exceeds any measure of human love – it almost contradicts anything we grow up believing within society about compassion and forgiveness and the consequence of sin. God sets the standard for how we as people of faith ought to live in relationship to each other: loving completely and unconditionally.

As we take this journey in life, as individuals and as a community, we are constantly facing choices. Will we walk in the path that God has set before us, making choices that are good and healthy and life-fulfilling? Or will we turn our back on God and make choices that are not good or healthy and destroy not only our lives but the lives of those around us. And even when take the wrong path and make the wrong choices, will we turn our hearts and minds back to God and appeal to God's goodness and forgiveness?

In our psalm for today we read these words: "Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is put away! Happy are they to whom the Lord imputes no guilt, and in whose spirit there is no guile." These are the words of one who understands that sometimes along the way we get lost. But God does not give up on us. God welcomes us back with open arms when we turn our hearts and our minds back to God. And God promises us that, if we our hearts are true, God will instruct us and teach in the way that we should go. God will guide us each step along the way!

As Jesus says to the woman in our Gospel lesson for today, "Your faith has saved you, now go in peace"! Thanks be to God. AMEN.