

July 28, 2024

Worship With Rejoicing: Call to Confession

2 Samuel 11:1-17

*“Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight;” Psalm 51:2-4*

Today, we are exploring a part of the Liturgy that brings to light humanity in all of us through the familiar story of King David, Bathsheba, and Uriah. For many of us, this text is one of the most uncomfortable in the Bible. How can we reconcile the fact that David, a man after God’s own heart, is also a sexual abuser and murderer? How can we even begin to structure a worship service around it? Do we keep the tone somber? Do we confront the weight of our capacity to sin? Or do we downplay David's actions, considering them as an extreme case beyond our own potential?

To be honest, none of those approaches sound like good options. In reality, David is not a unique case of particularly terrible sin. **Sin is sin.** It just so happens that David’s sins were written down and made public for all of us to read. So, we want to invite you not to approach this service with a particularly somber tone or to weigh yourself down with the terribleness of human sin. Instead, we invite you to approach David’s sin as an invitation to lay our individual and communal sins bare before God by giving specific attention to the call to confession.

Many people have said that the story's beginning in the first verse of 2 Samuel 11 is the beginning of the end of David. This event, this abuse of power, is where David’s decline began. There were bad decisions after bad decisions following this incident on the palace roof. 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.

Throughout history, there have been attempts to blame Bathsheba in order to absolve David. Some suggest that Bathsheba's beauty, availability, and visibility made it impossible for David to resist her, much like the flawed arguments that blame rape victims for their attacks based on their clothing or behavior. It's clear that the power dynamic lies with David, and the writer carefully explains Bathsheba's behavior, with the real culpability being attributed to David.

When Bathsheba informed the king of her pregnancy, he further compounded his sin by attempting to cover up his actions and ultimately plotting the murder of an innocent man, Uriah, who was faithful and patriotic. Uriah's honorable actions, defending the purity of his wife and remaining loyal to his king and country, resulted in his name being preserved in the genealogy of Jesus as recorded in Matthew. The offense against Bathsheba and Uriah is made clear, and while it may not be erased or redeemed, the text raises the question of whether the Messiah's arrival could provide some form of redemption.

What should we do with this story? We could, and maybe should, proclaim warnings about the abuse of power. This reminds us that no one is exempt or immune from bad behavior. But even that seems too volatile for the current times. It feels too pointed or too political. Yet, here we are, in second Samuel, reliving a story that makes us all uncomfortable. We won’t even get the rest of the story until next week. So, what should we do with this story?

**How do you feel when you hear the call to confession?** Many people don't particularly like the prayer of confession in worship.

Most of us who lead worship have been asked, sometimes directly, sometimes more indirectly, if it would be possible to skip it most of the time. "We're good people," we think. 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). 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 that, we do gather each week with regrets. Maybe not on David's scale because we have not 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 not fully helped those who are seeking help from us. 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, the same guilt, and the same sin.

When we come to worship, we need to bring our whole selves, including the things we struggle with. Like David, we have questions about how we use our power, even if we don't think we have any. There are fears and regrets that haunt our steps and decisions. We have things we have been taught to say, things we have done, and things we have left undone that weigh on us. This is why we need confession. **Confession allows us to offer all of this to God and 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. 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 not just about listing our faults and wrongs but also about having the chance to receive God's mercy and share in his abundant grace.** When we confess our sins to God, we take part in the beautiful work of reconciliation with Him.

So, with confidence in God's love for us and trust in His grace, let's listen to the call to confession, confess together, and then silently offer our confession to God.