



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Second Sunday in Lent, March 20th, 2011

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

Our most serious sins are often ones that we don't recognize at all. Sometimes they are even sins that we mistake for virtues. An English acquaintance of mine used to pride himself on what he called "plain speaking." In other words, he always spoke what was on his mind. In fact, it wasn't plain speaking at all – he had simply given himself license to be rude and insulting and convinced himself it was a virtue.

One of the Old Testament lessons appointed for Morning Prayer concerns a very serious sin that had gone unrecognized and unrepented. It is the account in the First Book of Kings of the confrontation between the prophet Nathan and David, Israel's greatest king. It took quick wits and a great deal of courage on Nathan's part even to raise the subject with the king because David certainly wouldn't have wanted to be reminded of the evil way in which he had treated a loyal and courageous friend, Uriah the Hittite.

God sent Nathan to confront David at a time when the great king was at the very pinnacle of his career. His wars to liberate the children of Israel from the clutches of their

enemies -- the Philistines, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, etc. -- had ended in victory. And his armies, commanded by subordinate generals, were fighting minor actions and conducting mopping up operations too insignificant to demand the attention of somebody as important as David.

Basking in success, and with time on his hands, David's thoughts -- like a number of highly successful business people today -- turned to love. (That, of course, is how he would have put it. Less charitable folks might describe it as lust.) In any event, he was strolling in his roof garden one day, when he spied a most attractive young lady taking a bath on the roof of a neighboring house.

The lady's name was Bathsheba and it's not quite correct to call her a lady because it isn't at all ladylike to parade about in her birthday suit in a place where a notably amorous king could cop an eyeful. Bathsheba husband, Uriah, was one of David's generals and he was out of town at the time, fighting David's battles for him. But David and Bathsheba didn't give it a second thought.

Then the inevitable happened. Bathsheba discovered she was expecting. David's solution to the problem was to recall Uriah from the battle front to make a report. Then he told him to go home and spend the night with his wife. Uriah refused the offer, saying he couldn't in all honor spend a night enjoying the comforts of home when his men were in the field

When David couldn't persuade Uriah to spend a night at home, he sent him back to the front carrying a note to Joab, his most ruthless general. It ordered Joab to lure Uriah to the forefront of the battle and abandon him there. It was a sentence of death. Nathan's duty was to tell David God knew what he had done and that he would suffer for it.

Nathan went to David and told him the story of a rich man who had vast acres of land and huge flocks of sheep and his poor neighbor who had only one animal – a little lamb that the poor man loved like a child. One day, friends arrived at the rich man's place hungry and expecting dinner. Instead of slaughtering one of his own sheep, the rich man slaughtered the poor man's lamb and served it up to his guests.

David was outraged. "That's terrible," he shouted, "Tell me the man's name and I'll put him to death. And his estate shall repay the poor man fourfold, because he had no pity. " And Nathan replied: "You are the rich man, King David. You took Uriah the Hittite's wife and sent him to his death because you were ashamed to face up to the consequences of the wrong you did him."

When Nathan confronted David, he expected to feel the king's sword on his

neck, but, instead, David fell to his knees and said: "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan replied: "The Lord hath put away your sin. You shall not die."

Three thousand years have passed since Nathan confronted the king about his sin against Uriah, and, like David, we are just as inclined to rationalize away the guilt for our misdeeds. Sometimes, like David, we fail to recognize our sins because we have manipulated other people into doing the deed for us. Often we try to blame God for what we have done. David might well have regarded Uriah's death in battle as an act of God. If God had wanted Uriah to live, he would have saved him.

But God's reaction to David's sin against Uriah assures us that no matter how terrible the sins we commit, God is always ready to forgive us as he forgave David. Through out his life, David enjoyed a special relationship with God not because he lived a life of perfection, but because he was always ready to face up to his sins, repent them and beg God's forgiveness.

For Christians, Lent is a season of self-examination: a time when, above all others, we confess our wicked thoughts and deeds and apologize to God and our fellow men for the wrongs we have committed. When we do so, we, too, can rely on Nathan's words: "The Lord hath put away your sin." Jesus died upon the Cross so that all that believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life." *AMEN*

***To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be
Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power,
Both Now and Forever. AMEN.***