

## **Confrontation and Confession**

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### **Gathering**

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#### **Acknowledgement of Country**

The Ancient of Days, [God the Creator], breathed life into this Land and her Peoples.

From time beyond our reckoning the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation have blessed this place through their care and concern.

We pay our respects to their Elders and Leaders, past and present, and we pray for the future of their communities.

May we walk gently and respectfully on this Land.

*(c) 2017, A.Koh-Butler, This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here.*

#### **Call to Worship**

Hold a mirror before us, O Lord.

What image of ourselves is reflected back?

Who do we see in the mirror?

A version of who we are that is photoshopped to look better than it is, or an image of who we are that fails to show the glory of the true created potential behind the grime of fault and weakness?

It is so hard to see that we share similarities with the characters of the bible who are flawed, yet also share in likeness with them the fact that nonetheless we are eternally under your love and mercy.

Today, let us find integrity in self-understanding, and let us find comfort in the knowledge of your love for us.

*Spill The Beans, Issue 39, Resources for 1 August 2021, p.94*

#### **Prayer**

Loving God,  
we come, like the prophets,  
because we are called to follow you,  
we come, like the disciples before us,  
because we are called to follow  
our Saviour Christ Jesus.  
We come, as your beloved children,  
we who live within the world  
we who are counted amongst humanity  
but are striving ever to be of you;  
we come.



We come,  
in this time of change,  
of despair but of emergent hope;  
bless our lives as we seek  
to leave the darkness of fear,  
and walk into the light of hope,  
for we come as we are,  
in need of your care,  
comforted in your love,  
giving thanks for your  
freely given grace.  
We come, as we are,  
in need of forgiveness  
for what we have done  
and what we have failed to do; we come.

We come,  
separated in space  
but united in community,  
help us today and every day  
to know what it is to follow you  
to walk in the footsteps of those who came before,  
to live like Jesus,  
and to be strengthened in the Spirit.  
We have been called loving God, so, we come,  
in Jesus' name, we come. Amen.

*Spill The Beans, Issue 39, Resources for 1 August 2021, p.94*

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### Listening for God's Voice

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#### **Reading: 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a**

<sup>26</sup> When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him.

<sup>27</sup> When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.

But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD,  
<sup>12</sup><sup>1</sup> and the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, 'There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor. <sup>2</sup>The rich man had very many flocks and herds; <sup>3</sup>but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meagre fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. <sup>4</sup>Now there came a traveller to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.' <sup>5</sup>Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, 'As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; <sup>6</sup>he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.'

<sup>7</sup> Nathan said to David, 'You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; <sup>8</sup>I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. <sup>9</sup>Why have you despised the word of the

Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. <sup>10</sup>Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. <sup>11</sup>Thus says the LORD: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. <sup>12</sup>For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.' <sup>13</sup>David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.'

## **Reading: Psalm 51**

### **Prayer for Cleansing and Pardon**

*To the leader. A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.*

- <sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.
- <sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.
- <sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.
- <sup>4</sup> Against you, you alone, have I sinned,  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you are justified in your sentence  
and blameless when you pass judgement.
- <sup>5</sup> Indeed, I was born guilty,  
a sinner when my mother conceived me.
- <sup>6</sup> You desire truth in the inward being;  
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
- <sup>7</sup> Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- <sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
- <sup>9</sup> Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.
- <sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me.
- <sup>11</sup> Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
- <sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing spirit.
- <sup>13</sup> Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
and sinners will return to you.
- <sup>14</sup> Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,  
O God of my salvation,  
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.
- <sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.

<sup>16</sup> For you have no delight in sacrifice;  
if I were to give a burnt-offering, you would not be pleased.  
<sup>17</sup> The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

<sup>18</sup> Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;  
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,  
<sup>19</sup> then you will delight in right sacrifices,  
in burnt-offerings and whole burnt-offerings;  
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Hear what God's Spirit is saying to the church.  
**Thanks be to God.**

### **Reflection**

Often in our services, we read the Psalm towards the beginning of the liturgy. Today, we read Psalm 51 after the reading from 2 Samuel because this Psalm is said to be David's response to God when he realises that he has done the wrong thing, or at least when he realises he has been found out...

These are not readings we hear very often in church, and they are not easy to preach on. There is much in these stories that is extremely uncomfortable - but that is not a reason to ignore them or gloss over them. What might we find when we engage with them...?

Let's go back to the beginning of the story.

David is the king of Israel.

He was a shepherd, the youngest boy in a large family, and yet he was chosen by God to be king of all Israel.

He had slayed a giant.

He had united the 12 tribes of Israel.

He had increased the size and wealth of the kingdom.

He had brought the Ark of the Covenant home to his new capital, Jerusalem.

So who knows what David did that displeased the LORD so much?

If you read back in chapter 11 of 2 Samuel, we discover that he takes a liking to another man's wife. He sees Bathsheba bathing next door and decides that he wants her. So he sends for her and sleeps with her (11:2-4).

Many biblical scholars today point out that the Scriptures make no reference to her agreeing - in today's world we would call it an abuse of power at best, or more likely, sexual assault.

And she falls pregnant (11:5).

So not content to leave it there, David first arranges for Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, to be brought back from his unit with the army, hoping that Uriah would sleep with his wife and no-one would ever know about what David had done. But Uriah refuses to go home and be comfortable when his men are sleeping in the open.

So David sends him back to the front and orders others to make sure Uriah is at the front of the next attack so that he would be killed. This plan worked and Uriah fell in the battle (11:17).

So we pick up the story as Bathsheba grieves for her husband, and David offers to take her in (11:26).

So adultery, likely sexual assault, conspiracy to murder - not surprisingly the Scriptures tell us that "the thing that David had done displeased the LORD." (11:27)

So God sends Nathan to speak with him.

Sometimes, prophets really do get the gnarly ones - just go to the king and point out his crimes and then let him know that God is "displeased" - I'm not sure I would want to be Nathan!

So Nathan goes to David and tells him a story.

The story is simple - and in its telling, David is quick to see the injustice and to pronounce judgment - he "deserves to die" (12:5-6).

And then the crunch, the confrontation, the harsh, raw truth as Nathan replies: "You are that man" (12:7). God anointed you king, gave you wealth and power, entrusted you with the leadership of God's people and look what you have done.

To which David responds, "I have sinned against the LORD." (12:13)

Psalm 51, then, is presented as David's confession - filling out what is not recorded for us in 2 Samuel.

Again it is not as straight forward as it looks at first sight...

"Have mercy on me" - so far so good (51:1). David seeks God's mercy.

"Against you alone have I sinned" - hmmm - what about Uriah? what about Bathsheba? (51:4)

While David acknowledges that he has sinned against God, and that it is God's forgiveness and cleansing that he needs, he seems to fail to acknowledge the impact he has had on the human lives around him.

There is no doubt that David is sorry before God for what he has done - but I wonder whether this Psalm was sung in Nathan's presence, whether it was sung to Bathsheba and her children, to Uriah's family.

Perhaps the fact that it is preserved for us in the hymn book of ancient Israel suggests that maybe it was heard more broadly.

<sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me.

<sup>11</sup> Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me.

<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Remember the Scriptures tell us that God had put God's spirit in David - so this prayer is a pleading for God to not abandon him, rather for God to restore him.

And here also David realises that there is no point making a burnt sacrifice to supposedly atone for his actions. What is needed is to bring to God his broken and contrite heart and spirit (51:16-17).

As the story goes on in 2 Samuel, we find that the baby Bathsheba had conceived dies in childhood.

Eventually, they have more children, one of them is Solomon (12:24) who will rule Israel after David.

I am not sure we can say much about Bathsheba remaining with David - it is likely she did not have any choice in that - after all he was still the king, and, as a woman, I doubt she had options given she was now a widow and had lost the financial support and protection of her husband. And it seems Bathsheba becomes a woman not to be messed with as she takes action later to ensure that her son succeeds David to the throne of Israel (see 1 Kings 1-2).

So how might this tragic season of David's life speak into our lives?

First it reminds us that corruption and power have been a reality since the beginning of humankind - just how far a powerful person will go when overtaken by lust - and the cover-up or denial or secrecy that goes with it - the events in our own Parliament in recent months has shown that this is not an ancient tale to be relegated to the depths of time and place. This story reminds those in places of power and privilege that their abuse of power will be remembered alongside their successes. David is indeed remembered as a remarkable leader, he and his son rules over the glory days of Israel, but this story is held within the story - a reminder of human frailty, giving into temptation and gross abuse of power.

Nathan, the prophet provides an example of being called by God to confront the secrets and lies and abuse of power. He doesn't go to David and accuse him of adultery or even murder, he tells David a story. And in the telling of a story, David entraps himself.

David finds himself confronted by his own abuse of power.

The story gives Nathan the opportunity to confront David and to let him know that God is "displeased".

I often wonder whether this technique would be successful today - in a world where accusations are often thrown from the media pack in the glare of cameras, what might happen if we tried the story approach?

And lastly, David - while in many ways his confession would be seen to be a little lacking in its attention to the particular people he has hurt along the way, he realises that no burnt offering will suffice - remember this comes from a time when burnt offerings were made to "atone" for sin.

David realises that he needs to be genuinely sorry.

And we note that even with his confession, he will live with the consequences.

If I asked where do you find yourself in this story, my guess is that each of us will find ourselves in different characters at different times.

There are some among us who will know what it is to be Bathsheba or her husband - betrayed by someone more powerful - and living with the consequences. I hope and pray that this community will gather around you, hold you and support you as you heal.

There are some, a few, who are David - knowing that they have done the wrong thing, aware of the hurt they have caused - seeking forgiveness and finding their way to rebuilding their life and career. I hope and pray this community will also hold you.

There are some who are Nathan - called to confront and challenge someone in power for the wrong they have done. May God give you strength and courage and may this community support you and hold you.

And there are many who will be bystanders, part of David's court or family or staff, friends of Bathsheba or Uriah. May you find ways to forgive, to hold, to support, to heal.

In Ephesians 4, we are reminded that we are called to be one body, called "to walk... with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Ephesians 4:2-5).

It takes us all, it is rarely easy.

May we come with humility and love, committed to being a living embodiment of Christ's love in the world.

So let us take a moment to reflect - on power, on its abuse, on challenging power, on confessing our failings, on committing to grow together as God's spirit is with us - we listen to a song, may it be our prayer...

**Listen** - Create In Me A Clean Heart

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fVliokreqE>

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## Responding

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### Prayer for Others

Loving God,  
in praise and in hope,  
with eyes open to the wonder of your grace,  
we present ourselves before you

in this building, in our homes,  
apart in space but united in your love.

Be among us today,  
join us together in the radical spirit of change and new perspectives, shine your light on the possibilities and the potential for a different way through you.  
As your church continues to discern our path forward we ask for the boldness to hold what is good,  
and overturn what blocks our path towards service of you and each other.  
We pray for all those who bear the heavy burden of leadership, that they find the wisdom to serve all peoples;  
we pray for the isolated and the lonely, that they will find strength and comfort in you;  
we pray for all those who are ill that they will find healing in your love.

We pray especially for our brothers and sisters in Christ who are grieving today - for Alan and Reuben and their families, for Edna and her family;  
for those who are caring for loved ones who are unwell or adjusting to new living arrangements;  
for each one who is finding the days hard and the nights harder.

Lift our eyes to see, our hearts to empathise and our hands to move in acts of care and compassion.

And on this day as we strive to follow your Son Jesus, on the path of love for all, caring for ourselves, and each other,  
help us to work to see and to seek the change for which this world is so desperate.  
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

*Based on a prayer from Spill The Beans, Issue 39, Resources for 1 August 2021, p.95*

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### **Sending out**

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#### **Sending**

Go into the world with confidence that comes from seeking the wisdom of God.  
Know that you are loved, that even when we get things wrong, God's love embraces you, dusts you off and invites you to try again.  
May you share that same love and grace with the people you encounter.

#### **Blessing**

And the blessing of God, Creator, Saviour and Spirit, is with you - always. Amen.

Rev Kath Merrifield  
1 August 2021