

The LORD Forgives You!

A sermon based on 2 Samuel 12:1-13

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Two of the hardest words in our language to say...what are they? "I'm sorry" would be a great guess. How hard, sometimes, it is to get past our pride, receive the criticism, see our fault, and admit our wrong-doing by saying, "I'm sorry."

But, as difficult as it is for us to say that, it's even harder to say this, "You're forgiven." And not just to say it but actually mean it. Do you agree? Someone admits their wrong, and now you're the one holding the power, and all you have to do is to relieve them with the words, "I forgive you."

Is that hard for you to say?

As we continue our walk through our worship service, as we continue to look for ways to be enriched in our worship together, today we stop here and rejoice in the wonderful privilege we have to approach the throne of our Father together, confess our sins and hear him say, "The LORD forgives you."

Our verses this morning are an awesome example of that forgiveness, wouldn't you agree? Do you remember this whole account? To summarize, one night, while up on his roof, David saw a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, bathing, and he lusted over her...and then he committed adultery with her. You see, she was already married to Uriah.

Well, this one time mistake could've have easily been covered up, except she got pregnant, and, despite David's best efforts, he couldn't cover that up by having Uriah sleep with her. So he had Uriah killed so he could take Bathsheba as his wife, and everything appeared decent and honorable.

Then we come to our verses today, where God, who wasn't fooled, sent his prophet Nathan to confront David with his sin. And through this touching story of a poor man whose only lamb was taken from him and slaughtered to feed his rich neighbor's guests (which infuriated David), Nathan led David to see his own sin, repent of it, and be forgiven.

Again, perhaps that's all familiar to you. But what I want to know is: why did it take so long to get there? Why did it take so long for David to repent? You know, we often look at these verses in 2 Samuel and assume, yeah, it went boom, boom, boom. David committed adultery, he had Uriah killed, and then, right after that, Nathan came and rebuked him. Yet, looking at this section in the Bible, we can tell a bit of time passed between Uriah's death and David's repentance (probably close to a year) because by the time Nathan came, the baby had already been born.

So, again, why so long? What was it like for David during that time, knowing what he had done, having to live with the guilt? What did he do?

Well, I can tell you what he didn't do. He didn't confess. David, the prolific psalm-writer, who enjoyed such a close relationship to God, didn't even appear to have written a single psalm during this period. More likely than not, he was depressed and distraught and lost all joy in living. In a later psalm (our Psalm 32) David described this time of his life in this way: ***"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer."***

Oh, he felt remorse. His kind of remorse was not really repentance, though. It led only to bitterness and regret and the loss of peace of heart and mind. It focused him only on the consequences he deserved for his sin, and it drove his focus away from God...until Nathan shifted it back.

Thankfully, things are different for us today. Not that we don't sin and have sins to confess. God's Word tells us, **"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."** I don't think any of us would make that claim. But our opportunities to be confronted with those sins and to confess those sins and come back to God for his forgiveness for those sins...those opportunities come more frequently, don't they?

Every Sunday, we hear right away about the triune God we're here to worship. We are reminded we are baptized children of God. And then, immediately, the focus shifts to "I'm not worthy" to have this blessed name of Christ on me and to be part of his family. "I'm not worthy" to be in the presence of my holy God when I'm not anywhere close to that. "I'm not worthy."

We have the opportunity to join together and to confess our sins to each other and to God...the sins we know we commit, the sins we don't even know we've done, the sin we have simply because we're here, born of sinful parents...here we get to bare our sinful hearts to our God and ask for his loving forgiveness.

...and you rejoice every time you get to do that?!?!

You know, in our verses, we heard David's simple response to this grand accusation, **"I have sinned against the LORD."** But we don't get any of the emotion. We don't get any of his inner thoughts. But we do know how he was feeling. Remember that vehement anger David had towards the rich man, ready to hang him for his crimes? That anger, now directed at himself, a man pained, humbled, broken by the recognition of his own wickedness and the ugly wrath from God he deserved.

Is that your experience here, whenever we walk through confession in worship? Where your knees are weakened, where you're nearly on the verge of tears because you recognize your own sinfulness, the seriousness of it, and how you don't deserve to stand in the presence of our holy and perfect God who demands holiness and perfection from you?

Or has confession become drab...rote...ineffective? In his *Large Catechism*, Martin Luther wrote on confession, and he started out by talking about how the Roman Catholic Church had turned it into something so vulgar and hated because they forced the people go to confession under the threat of committing the gravest mortal sin if they didn't. But then, he also writes, that forced confession **"so greatly burdened and tortured consciences with the enumeration of all kinds of sin that no one was able to confess purely enough."** No one could ever completely confess all their sins. And to so many people, confession became **"sheer anguish and a hellish torture (Luther's words)."**

We don't have that. We aren't forced to confess our sins. We aren't forced to have to recount every single sin we've committed. But then Luther goes on, **"Unfortunately, people have learned it (that confession isn't something coerced but is something that is God-pleasing) only too well; they do whatever they please and take advantage of their freedom, acting as if they should or need not go to confession anymore."**

You're here. You're doing it (hopefully). But are you really in it? Or, is it a show, like the Pharisee in our gospel for today?

Friends, I get it. It can be uncomfortable. It can be uncomfortable to admit our weaknesses and our sins. It can be uncomfortable to wear our hearts (and our sins) on our sleeves for all to see. Luther even wrote, **"Not one of**

you would want his story written on his forehead. All of us still gladly hear people praise and honor us. No one thinks: Ah, God be gracious to me; for if the sins of which I am conscious in my heart were evident to the world, I should deserve to be hanged. To be sure, the world honors me; but if it knew who I am, it would spit at me – But if we realized this, it would serve to humble us before God.”

I’ve sinned. You have too. For all the times we’ve treated this part of worship so casually, unimportant, or have simply glossed confession over without much thought or care, or have merely muttered the words without true confession of our hearts, we’ve sinned. If that’s ever been you, if that was you even just this morning, if that’s never been you but you have other sins, let’s take a few moments right now for some personal confession.

And I, as a called servant of Christ, as a fellow brother in Christ, am so happy to repeat Nathan’s words to you, **“The LORD has taken away your sin.”**

There you go. Immediate absolution.

Can you imagine what it might have been like if David had had to wait for God’s forgiveness? I’m sure you’ve been there before, you’ve hurt someone you love, cut them deep. Maybe it was a joke that went a little too far or a light-hearted comment that they took the wrong way. You give the heartfelt “I’m sorry” and they just walk away, saying nothing. It’s torture. Are they still mad at you? Have they forgiven you? The guilt gnaws at you; you want to know.

For David, it would have been God he was waiting on for the answer. It might have been the end of him. There wasn’t even a slight pause, though. Just “the LORD has taken away your sin.”

And friends, the same happens here. Here, you get the time to go one on one with your Lord, bare wide your heart and show him your faults, your mistakes, your sins. God waits for that. God waits for each of us to confess and acknowledge our sins in the same way as David.

And God waits to forgive and to heal and restore your heart when you turn to him in repentance. For no sooner do you confess your sins than God through his servant says, “I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

It’s a beautiful picture – God’s forgiveness – isn’t it? You and I, his prodigal son/daughter returns, aware of our sins and aware of his eternal wrath we well deserve. And without hesitation, he wraps you in his warm embrace and whispers in your ear, “You are forgiven.” No mention of past faults. No long list of grievances and past debts. Just the firm assurance, “You are forgiven.”

You know why. You are forgiven because it’s the ‘LORD’ who forgives you. You know the LORD, don’t you? The LORD (all capitals), our God of free and faithful grace. The same LORD who forgave David’s ugly sins without hesitation is the LORD who has forgiven and absolved you.

Again, you know why. You are forgiven because that long list of grievances, debts, sins became someone else’s. Maybe you’ve had it at Starbucks or McDonalds, you go through the drive thru, pull up to the payment window, and the worker says, “Don’t worry about it, the person in front of you got it.”

Jesus did that for you, on a much, much, much larger scale. The sins we’ve confessed...the sins we haven’t confessed...every sin we’ve committed in the past, present, and future, Jesus looked at your receipt and gladly said, “I’ll take this.” And he did, all the way to the cross, where he paid for every last – even minor - mistake of

yours with the payment of his perfect life and his innocent death. And now you drive up to the window of God's judgment, he looks at you and gladly says, "It's already been paid for. You're forgiven!"

And, friends, he goes one step further and shares with us the same words Nathan did with David, ***"The LORD has taken away your sin. YOU ARE NOT GOING TO DIE."***

Why do you think Nathan wanted David to know that, that he wasn't going to die? Yeah, according to the Hebrew law, that's exactly what he deserved. Leviticus 20 simply states, ***"If a man commits adultery with another man's wife – with the wife of his neighbor – both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death."*** And Leviticus 24: ***"If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death."*** That's the punishment David deserved. But in the LORD'S forgiveness, it's a punishment he wouldn't face.

And neither will you. For any of our sins, God would be justified to strike us dead with lightning where we stand or sit right now and send us straight to hell. But he won't. You will not die an eternal death because Jesus suffered hell for you.

That's the beauty of absolution! That's the forgiveness you get every Sunday here. And now, you can go about the rest of the service relieved, happy...not because we've gone to confession, done our duty, and now we can be proud of ourselves. We're relieved and refreshed because once again, we have forgiveness.

What an amazing thing that happens at confession and absolution. Here's a few tid-bits of what Martin Luther wrote about this part of our worship:

If you are a Christian, you should be glad to run more than a hundred miles for confession, not under compulsion but rather coming and compelling us to offer it.

For those who really want to be upright Christians and free from their sins, and who want to have a joyful conscience, truly hunger and thirst already. They snatch at the bread just like a hunted deer, burning with heat and thirst, as Psalm 42:1 says, "As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God." That is, as a deer trembles with eagerness for a fresh spring, so I yearn and tremble for God's Word or absolution and for the sacrament, etc.

I hope and pray that's you. There are no sweeter than when Jesus says to you, "The LORD forgives you." And it doesn't just have to happen here, either. Martin Luther, the very first of his 95 Theses, wrote, ***"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent," he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."*** Every day of your life gets to be one of confession and absolution. And when you do, here's God's encouragement, ***"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."***

You are a sinner. There's no running from that fact. What will you do now? Take Luther's encouragement, ***"When God points his spear at you, do not flee from him; on the contrary, flee to Him with a humble confession of guilt and a plea for pardon. Then God will draw back his spear and spare you."*** Humbly confess your sins, and rejoice to hear God's absolution, "I forgive you." Words sweeter than honey. Every time! Amen.