

ORDINARY SUNDAY 11 - JUNE 13, 2010.  
2 Samuel 12:1-13; Luke 7:36-50

This story is a wonderful Old Testament insight into sin, judgment, punishment, forgiveness and the possibility of new beginnings under God's mercy. David was the king, a man chosen and anointed by God to lead his people in covenant ways. But he sinned. Significantly, the sin of the king was a sin of self-centred passion. The story is all about a man putting himself and his own needs before his responsibility to serve God by serving God's people.

The king was in Jerusalem and one night wandered to the top of the house. These rooves were flat open spaces, ideal for sleeping during the hot evenings. While he was there he spied Uriah's wife cooling herself on another roof. She would have been scantily clothed and her beauty entranced David. One thing led to another and they ended up lovers and she ended up pregnant. What was the sin here?

For the Bible writers it was not primarily adultery, it was the king looking on everything else as his own possession, even another man's wife. As king he should have understood that he could not live according to what was good for him, could not just please himself and act as though the only thing that counted was his own wellbeing and satisfaction. All of the other sins – adultery, murder and lies, flowed out of this fundamental sin of selfishness. It is the sin of Adam and Eve, the sin that says: *I know I am not supposed to eat that piece of fruit but I would really like to have the knowledge of good and evil.* Once the person heads off along the path of the self, all other considerations go out the window. Sin follows on from sin and David, blinded by his selfishness, is no longer aware of just how terrible he has become. His eyes are all on himself.

That is where the role of the prophet comes in. He is the one sent by God to shake the cage of the comfortable king. He gets David to see the difference between what he thinks, believes and preaches and the life he is leading. He says he is God's man for God's people, that he is busy doing God's business but all along his service of God is tempered by his selfishness. He is a cardboard king. On the outside people see a faithful servant but the real David is a different kind of man. He is corrupt and it is a bit of a shock to see just how corrupt he has become. Behind that external veneer there is an adulterer, a liar, a manipulator and a murderer. That is the bubble that Nathan bursts.

The story is great. When the prophet tells his little story, David is furious and proclaims: *As Yahweh lives, the man who did this deserves to die!* And the prophet's reply: *That man is you.* Deep down David must have known that he was a sinner. His response shows that. The trouble is that it was really everyone else who was in sin, everyone else but himself. He was so filled with his own sense of self-importance, that he could no longer see his own sins. He could commit adultery and murder someone and think nothing of it. It was the role of the prophet to bring this man back, to bring the light of God's judgment into his life so that he repented, turned from his sins and once again was the faithful king he was called to be.

That is the great thing in this story. There is no attempt to cover up the sin of David. The editors are not trying to pretend that what he did was anything but evil. It is all there to be seen. What they do show is the way God responds to sin and failure. He invites David to repent. He confronts him with his sinfulness, makes it impossible for him to evade his guilt and then pronounces judgment.

But with God there is always the possibility of a new beginning. Yes, there is punishment and for us it seems a terrible punishment, but the point is that for David it is not the end. God is a God who forgives. God is a God who offers new beginnings. God is a God with whom there is always the chance of a new beginning, new possibilities and new life. But that is only

available when there is a willingness to face up to sin. It does not matter how serious the sin may be, with God there is always the chance of a new beginning. That is what is important. God knows his servants well and there is no doubt that he loves David and continues to love David. Having called him, he is not now going to abandon him. But he does demand that David leave behind his life of self-centredness and get back to having God at his centre.

### **Luke 7:36-50**

Luke's Gospel follows on this theme of God's forgiveness and it is a story that is found only in his Gospel. There are a number of key items in this that are peculiarly Lucan. The first one is the Pharisee. He is the one who for his own reasons invites the prophet Jesus into his house. One suspects that it is because Jesus has become so popular. He has crowds following him, is renowned for his preaching and his teaching and it may just be possible that he is who the crowds say he is. This is one Pharisee who is lining himself up to ride the coat tails of this prophetic figure.

He is also a man of some standing. He is the professional holy man, the man who has all of the trappings of his office, who is respected and protected by the people. And it is this man of standing who invites Jesus into his home. Once there, though, he violates all of the standard rules of hospitality which were of such importance to the people of the time. He does not greet Jesus. He does not offer him water to wash his feet. He offers Jesus nothing. It is as if the greatest gift he can give to Jesus is inviting him into his house! Somehow Jesus should be greatly moved to be invited into the house of such an important Pharisee. On the surface he shows Jesus respect but in reality he is trying to use him for his own benefit. He was not really interested in Jesus, just what Jesus might be able to do for him. So blind was he to everything else apart from his own career that he did not even notice the needy woman who was also in the room. To him she was not a daughter of God, just a terrible sinner.

You can imagine the conversation that might have gone on with the Pharisee. He would have been outlining how Jesus should go about his ministry, go about his work as a prophet and a holy man. The man was so blind to his own limitations that he was unable to cope with anyone who might reveal his inadequacies, his sins, his fears and his weaknesses. This will be exactly why the same Pharisees put him to death.

The other key person, of course was the woman. She stands out in stark contrast to the Pharisee. Both are sinners but the thing about the woman is that she is well aware of her sins and is ashamed of them and repents of them. This is shown most powerfully in the image Luke presents for us – she is weeping and washing his feet, anointing them; she is heartbroken over her sinful ways and comes to Jesus in the hope of being forgiven and being given the opportunity to begin again. There is nothing pompous or self-serving about this woman in the story. She is all about facing her fallen self, her sinfulness, her weakness and her failure. She knows she is a woman in need. She accepts it, admits it and comes before her Lord in humble submission.

This is the key to the story - the contrast between the two characters. One full of arrogant self-importance, who is more interested in preserving his state in life and the conditions of his service that he rejects the Son of Man. He is a shell of a man of God. On the other hand there is the sinful woman. She has no pretensions. She hides nothing from Jesus and comes before him as a sinner in need. She goes away healed, restored and forgiven. In the end she has the great biblical gift of "Shalom" of God's divine Peace.

The telling line is where Jesus addresses the Pharisee saying to him: *The person forgiven little, loves only a little.* The Pharisee was forgiven little because he was not willing to accept that he was a sinner. He was living a false life, a life of deception, a life in which he was the centre. Such a person might be able to give a theoretical acceptance that he was a sinner but

he never really believed it. For Jesus, it was because he could not accept his sinfulness that he could not be forgiven and because he could not be forgiven he was incapable of love. That is the sad part. He cannot love others because he does not know what it is to be loved by God and that goes to the heart of it all.

**Conclusion:**

Sin is one of those words that few want to hear about today. Here in the West we rarely hear a sermon on sin. It is almost if it is impossible for a person to sin. We are able to justify and rationalize just about anything. A bit like David really. We can easily measure our lives and evaluate others in terms of how things impact on us and our lives. If it is good for us, then it is good. If it impacts in any negative way on our lives then it is not good. And that is the breeding ground of sin – the self, selfishness.

But the call of Jesus is to acknowledge our sins. John the Baptist told us about it and in so doing he was picking up a long standing theme from the prophets. A person who cannot acknowledge their sins and who is not willing to repent cannot know God. It is as simple as that. The Pharisee thought he was a servant of God, a professional holy man but in fact he was far from God. Whatever it was he did in the synagogue and the temple, whatever of his surface appearance in the community, he was far from God.

The woman, that terrible sinner, was in fact the person who found herself in the embrace of God's love. She came to Jesus as a sinner in need. She left the house with the gift of peace. She was healed, restored and forgiven in Jesus Christ. That is why the Gospel is Good News and the good part about that news is that it offers us the same gift of peace. To gain it we need to acknowledge our sinfulness, turn to God with repentant hearts and allow him to raise us up and send us out with his power. As he has forgiven us, so we need to forgive others. If we cannot do that, then our own repentance is a sham.