



- Psalm 51:1-12** - Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
- ² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are proved right when you speak
and justified when you judge.
- ⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
- ⁶ Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;
you teach me wisdom
in the inmost place.
- ⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.
- ¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Pointing out sin...Proclaiming the gospel



I was miserable. I had a great job – I really loved what I did. I guess that happens when God appoints your job for you. I was successful. People looked up to me. I was the most important person around. I was a man after God’s own heart, but I was miserable. I was so depressed and worried and afraid and felt so guilty that I was getting physically sick. What happened? How could I go from the heights of happiness and fulfillment to the depths of despair and depression? I guess it started when I saw her. Her beauty was striking, and I couldn’t think of anything else but making her my own. The trouble was, she was married. And so was I. But that didn’t stop me. I knew in my heart of hearts that having her would make me happy, so I went ahead. That’s when the trouble started. You’ve probably heard a story similar to mine, so you can guess what happens next. Secrets, lies, and a baby on the way.

I couldn’t very well let people find out about this, least of all her husband. So I killed him. I mean, there was no blood on my hands, but I sent him off carrying his own death warrant and he didn’t even know it. Within a matter of days he was dead. I thought that would solve the problem, but it only made things worse. Adultery, lying, murder, deception - all of it swirled around my head and my heart constantly. Those memories didn’t give me a moment’s rest. Like I said before, I was so racked with guilt that it started to make me physically sick. Here’s a couple of lines from a poem I wrote about that time in my life: **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.** I was miserable.

But then my pastor, Nathan, came to talk to me. “Great,” I thought. I had kept this whole thing under wraps, and now I have to look this man-of-God in the eye and try to hold it all together? My pastor told me this story about a rich man who had herds and herds of sheep and cattle. Tons of them. But the rich man’s poor neighbor only had one little lamb who ate with him, and even slept in his arms. He treated that lamb like his own child. (I had to wonder, “Where’s this going, pastor?”) One day, a hungry visitor came to the rich man’s house, but instead of cooking up one of his hundreds of sheep for a meal, he snagged his poor neighbor’s one little lamb. I got mad. “*How dare he! What a scoundrel, he deserves to die!*” Then my pastor lifted his hand and pointed his finger straight at me. **You are the man!** And just like that, the cat was out of the bag. My sin had been exposed. My world looked like it was going to come crashing down. Now what?

If you haven’t guessed it by now, I’m not telling you my personal life story. But can’t you relate with some, if not most, of King David’s story? After that ordeal of sin, concealment, confrontation, and repentance, King David wrote the words of Psalm 51, our sermon text for today. Out of the 150 songs that compose the book of Psalms, Psalm 51 is among the richest. It displays both the blackest depths of sin and the purest cleansing of God’s forgiveness. Listen to David’s heartfelt prayer for mercy in these verses from Psalm 51: **Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. 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, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out my iniquity.

The prophet Nathan was acting as his brother's keeper. Nathan pointed out David's sin and David realized he didn't need a superficial cleaning. He needed a supernatural cleansing. He didn't need a little moral performance enhancement. He needed a complete transformation that came from outside of himself. David came to know the depths of his sin and his desperate need for God's mercy. But, on what grounds could he stand? He had made a mess of his life, he'd lost the respect of his people, and most offensively he had sinned against the holy God. On what ground could he possibly stand before this holy God? *God, have mercy on me...certainly not because of who I am or what I could do. God forgive me, have mercy on me, cleanse me, clean me, make me whole for the sake of who you are – gracious, merciful, compassionate to me in Christ.* David's entire prayer to God, just like ours, is based on God's mercy and grace – his undeserved love and favor toward sinners. David repented. David rejoiced that a brother in faith cared enough to do the brave thing and confront him in his sin.

That's the thrust of our three Scripture lessons this morning – being our brother's or sister's keeper. The Lord had told his prophet Ezekiel that he'd better call a sin a sin, because eternal souls were on the line. Paul tells of a confrontation he had with Peter who had given public offense to the gospel. In our gospel lesson this morning, Jesus teaches his people the important work of being our brother's and sister's keeper. This is sometimes called Christian discipline. And Christian discipline involves Christian confrontation. If someone is caught up in a sin, we have the Christian responsibility, actually, the Christian privilege to point it out to them in a loving way. Why? So we can prove our piety or sanctimonious smugness over against our fellow Christian? No! We do it to win them back. We do it so we can proclaim the most profound and beautiful words of the gospel to repentant sinners – just like Nathan got to say to King David – **The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.** And guess what? Those words aren't just a pious wish; they're a divine promise...As Jesus himself said, **Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven...if you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven.** Not empty words. Not simply a "that's OK" after an apology. Those words of Jesus coming from your mouth are dripping with blood – divine blood of the Son of God who suffered hell itself on the cross to take away each and every sin. And, grace upon grace, he puts that wonderful news on your lips and mine – to show a fault in love so that we can proclaim the gospel in all its joy.

Warning a brother or sister about their sin is the loving thing to do. The devil wants to make this look like the height of hypocrisy or sticking our nose in someone else's business. But his motives are only self-serving. Think about it. The angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents, but



the devil rejoices over that sinner who never gets to hear about his sin's seriousness. This is eternally important work we get to do as Christians. If your toddler were outside playing in the middle of a busy street, would you just say, "Kids will be kids!" and leave him be? Of course not! Why? Because you can see he is in immediate danger. Nobody wants to wake up their neighbor at 6 am on a Saturday, but what if his house was on fire, would you do it then? The work Jesus gives us to do is unquestionably important. But that doesn't mean it's going to be easy.

Think of the pressure that faced the prophet Nathan – to march up to the king and call him an adulterer and murderer! The pressure facing us is no different. *What if they call me a hypocrite? What if they never talk to me again? What if they snap back and bring up some sin from my past?* Concerns like that always try to cloud our vision, and so more often than not we keep quiet. We reason, "Someone else will do it." Or, "They're probably OK...it's not my business." So, we stand silently as someone marches away from God. With David we pray, **Have mercy on me, O God...blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity...cleans me from my sin.** And he has. And he does. In his grace he sends us back out to carry on this important task of being our brothers' and sisters' keeper. He doesn't leave us alone with this work. Consider the motivation he gives you. Remember, God first came looking for you.

In Psalm 51, David bases his plea for mercy on God's "great compassion." How great is God's compassion? It led him to do the unthinkable. Rather than tell the doomed mass of humanity to "get your act together, and then we'll talk," God demonstrated his great and intense compassion in this – while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. A God who justifies the wicked, present tense, right now, this moment – and doesn't wait for the wicked to become less wicked before he pardons and forgives. That's how intense God's compassion is just for you – in answer to your sin, your wickedness, your rebellion – washed, cleansed, forgiven, made whole. And now he puts that powerful promise on your lips to rebuke the sin of another and , when they repent, forgive them for Jesus' sake. And what's the result? A thankful heart of faith.

In the high-point of Psalm 51, David prays, **Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.** Sound familiar? David's prayer is our prayer. Thank God that someone cared enough to point out sin in my life. Thank God that that someone pointed me back to my Savior God, whose mercies are new every morning. God grant us that same steadfast spirit to rebuke sin and forgive for Jesus' sake who has so fully and freely forgiven us. Amen.

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 24-25)