

**11 Pentecost
August 5, 2018**

**In the name of God, who in Jesus taught us
the meaning of unconditional Love.**

AMEN

As we consider our Scripture readings for today, I would like to share my reasoning for focusing on the First Lesson we heard this morning with the continuing saga of King David, rather than the Gospel. I could never overlook the Gospel with its emphasis on Jesus as the Bread of Life, since our entire liturgy, our worship together, centers on that gift for us. But, since the last verse of today's Gospel is the first verse of next Sunday's Gospel, I will focus on that message next week...and today see what more we can learn from Second Samuel. But, just before that, I want to bring before us the message from Ephesians because it is so powerful and I don't want it to be lost in the melodrama of our Old Testament reading

So, here we go: Today's second reading is part of Paul's letter to the young Christian Community at Ephesus. He tells them, and US today, what are the most important marks of a Christian congregation. He says they *must lead lives WORTHY of their calling*. In other words, we are to follow a way of life that is noticeably Christian. And Paul says that some of the characteristics of this way of life are *humility and gentleness, and .. bearing one another's burdens with patience & love*. We know this isn't always easy. We know how difficult it can be to ...as he says...*maintain the bonds of peace*. Yet so important are our efforts to preserve unity, that Paul presents a very moving plea for this kind of Christian Community. He writes "*There is **one** Body...and **one** Spirit... **one** Lord, **one** Faith, **one** Baptism, **one** God and Father of all ...who is above all and through all...and in all.*

And he speaks about the many Spiritual gifts, which exist precisely in order to build up the community, the Body of Christ. He really places great importance on what each one of us has been given, in order for there to be a healthy, spiritual community...and encourages us to use our gifts for the good of all.

Paul understands Christian faith as a lifelong growing to maturity,... as he says, "to the **measure** of the full stature of Christ". ... Now that's some measure! ! Christian faith is not a fixed state but a process ...a **journey** ever closer to Jesus. Paul says we must grow up!! and claim our gifts! for the good of the body of Christ, to enable it to build itself up in love. A beautiful message, really. Even though it is a bit stern.////////

So, - - - now, - - - on to the melodrama of the greatest King the Hebrew nation ever knew...King David. Many of you were here last Sunday when the Bible reading was pretty graphic about how David lusted after Bathsheba, and not only followed through on that lust, but so deviously had her husband killed in battle. So.. today's Gospel follows on that part of the story.////////// Ah, But First...a digression.

Along the way in my priesthood I was the Chaplain and Bible and Religion teacher at a Boarding and Day High School in Connecticut. One of my major responsibilities was to TRY to provide Chapel every morning to kids who always wanted me to know that there was nothing that could interest them in Chapel. And, because a Bible course was mandatory for graduation, I also had the significant challenge of teaching the Bible to teenagers who absolutely considered it a kind of cruel and unusual punishment. So much so that they put it off until their Senior year...which made my task all the more unlikely to succeed.

Well, this story has a happy ending because the Grace of God shined on me, and I was somehow inspired to begin the first class with this very story we have been following about King David in Second Samuel, this very story of lust, greed, murder, lust, envy, pride, lust, power...and, yes, redemption. And yes, I am very glad Ted did not leave a week earlier for his vacation so **he** had to deal with the rather bawdy text last week! And what a powerful message he had, leaving us with the awareness of God's redemption no matter what, and, a feeling of singing Hallelujah inside.

Oh, and the end of the story about my trial of teaching the Bible to a bunch of brawny, know-it-all, high school seniors, who needed to act out how much they did not want to be there, is that they were clearly hooked to find that all of this is also in the Bible. A couple of them told me after class that this was the **coolest** class because their first assignment was to look through the Bible and see who could come in with the ...naughtiest story.

So, today...David. What he has done has displeased the Lord. Not only has he taken Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, a trusted and faithful officer in his army, but also David has personally planned the betrayal and death of her husband, Uriah, a very good man. Now Bathsheba is pregnant with their child...that is...David and Bathsheba's child.

And now...Nathan enters the picture. We now see Nathan, in the honored prophet's role, as the conscience of the community. He goes to David and confronts him in a masterly way, telling a seemingly simple story about some humble figure in David's kingdom, never giving David the slightest suspicion that this has anything to do with himself. When David registers anger and demands to know the identity of this dreadful person, he is answered by the terse, chilling response: **YOU** are the man!

There follows a grim and implacable recital of what David has done. Presumably the King listens silently with head bowed. It would be hard to imagine how else he would have received this rebuke, other than calling for his guards and having Nathan executed on the spot. Again, we are made to realize the immense prestige attached to the role of prophet, and also Nathan's immense courage in risking his life to take up this role about such an issue. All this is shown so dramatically in David's response: "*I have sinned against the Lord.*"

And right here we see a little of David's greatness! He could have lashed out at Nathan. He could have passed the blame to Bathsheba. He could have made excuses of the kind we are

accustomed to hear nowadays, blaming his upbringing as the real cause of his present actions and choices, or he could have taken another stand that we have heard all too often, which would be to utterly minimize the horror and sinfulness of what he has done. Instead,...David simply and honestly and shamefully takes responsibility before Nathan and before the Lord.

So, we have just ended the vivid telling of a particularly sad and sordid situation. Bathsheba's husband, Uriah is dead. Bathsheba has given birth to a son...David's son. David sits on his throne dispensing justice, ruling his kingdom in other ways, while carrying in his heart a great guilt. And we have seen a courageous Nathan, the prophet, challenge the king, forcing him to face what he has done being a mirror for him.

////////There are times in all our lives when we look in a mirror and don't like what we see. We realize, sometimes with a shock, what we are capable of doing. It may be a petty betrayal of another, as in passing along gossip that may... or may not.. be true. Or it may be a major betrayal of another. It may be an action in professional life that is technically within the law, but unscrupulous and perhaps cruel to another or even to a great many others. It may be something so beneath us that we live with fear that it would ever be found out. In such a moment we can say with our psalm from earlier this morning: *"I know my transgressions and my sins are ever before me."* When this happens, we are fortunate if we can hear what our psalm is saying to us. Beyond those who may have suffered for what we have done, there is the God whom we have offended. Often in today's world this is dismissed as religious guilt tripping. But, I suggest that in reality, it is a gift to us...a gift because the God whom we have offended is also the very God who forgives us!! We do not have to carry our guilt forever! God does not go on probing old guilt like an open wound. Instead, we can say of God: *"You look for truth deep within me...and will make me understand wisdom (about myself in this case) secretly."*

Our Baptismal vows include the question: *"Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?"*

The issue is not whether we will fall into sin, or fail to resist evil, the issue is WHENEVER WE DO, WILL WE REPENT AND RETURN TO THE LORD!

And let's not overlook that the response to that question asked at Baptism is, *"I Will...with God's help!"* I will, with God's help! So,... for us, the Good News is that, because we have such a relationship with this God to whom we are invited and encouraged to bring our guilt and shame...and who among us has none of that? means the possibility, indeed, the likelihood of a clean heart...a right spirit...**JOY!**

Praise God for His unfailing Love for us.

AMEN