



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

“When I Kept Silent”

Rev. David K. Groth

Ash Wednesday, 2013

“For 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 dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin”

Psalm. 32:3-5

February 13, 2013

Collect of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, You despise nothing You have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and contrite hearts that lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness we may received from You full pardon and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

One day King David went out onto his palace roof. It's late in the afternoon; he's up there presumably to enjoy the cool breezes. He looks down over his city, and he sees a woman bathing. Her name is Bathsheba and she is gorgeous. Her beauty inflames the king's desires. He has to have her, and as king, he usually gets what he wants.

He sends messengers and they bring Bathsheba to David. He lies with her and she conceives a child. To what extent she is complicit Scripture doesn't say. In any event, she's in a lot of trouble, for she has a husband named Uriah. If she is found out, she could be stoned. Long story short: David tries to cover over his sin with lies and deceptions. As often happens, something that starts small snowballs. David finally arranges for Uriah to be killed. It all works out according to plan and Uriah dies on a battlefield, looking like just another casualty. David takes Bathsheba home to be his wife. The king gets the woman of his dreams, and, at the same time, he gets away with murder. In 2 Samuel 11, not even the narrator of the story challenges David's behavior. But then comes the last verse of the chapter: "The thing David had done displeased the Lord." That is, the story may not yet be over.

A year passes. David says nothing to anyone. His secret is safe and Bathsheba bears him a son. On the outside things are going just swimmingly for David. On the inside, the guilt is starting to tear him to pieces.

Not even kings can so easily rid themselves of guilt. He writes about it in Psalm 32. “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away . . . For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.”

He also writes about his guilt in Psalm 38, “O LORD . . . your arrows have sunk into me, and your hand has come down on me. There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin.”

The ancient Hebrews believed that sin and guilt impact the entire person . . . not just the soul or spirit, but also the body, the bones, the energy, the mood, the posture. I think there’s something we can learn from that ancient wisdom. What is bad for the soul is also bad for the body. Again, from Psalm 38, “For my iniquities . . . are like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. . . I am utterly bowed down . . . I am feeble and crushed.” Part of it is the weight of guilt and part of it is the weight of the Lord’s hand. “Your hand was heavy upon me” David writes.

The point is, if you bottle up your sin and guilt, it’s going to have an impact on who you are. If you try to hide it or deny it or push it back, it’s going to creep up somewhere else. It’s like pressing your fingers down a balloon that is only half full of air. The air has to go someplace, so it expands on either side of your hand and between your fingers. Likewise, guilt doesn’t just go away on its own. We press it down but it manifests itself in other ways, maybe in the form of fatigue or stress, headaches or ulcers, high blood pressure . . . maybe in the form of over eating , or addictions or broken marriages. Ultimately sin and guilt manifests itself in the form of death, for the wages of sin is not just a side ache; the wages of sin is death. Because of sin, the bones literally waste away, as the dust on your foreheads testify.

So what is a person to do? Where can one find relief? Vs. 5: “I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did

not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin." The relief comes with repentance and with the Lord's forgiveness.

Notice, David doesn't deny or minimize his sin or make excuses for himself or blame someone else. He confesses his sin. And notice he calls it sin. It's not a lapse in judgment. It's not an accident or a mistake. He calls it what it is. He takes personal responsibility and owns up to his transgressions, and says "I have sinned".

We live in an era that has very nearly forgotten how to do that. Even among Christians for whom repentance should be as natural as breathing, yet sometimes we can hardly bring ourselves to do it. And so we say things like, "I'm sorry if I offended you" which is a pathetic apology. Actually, it's an indictment. "If you weren't so hyper-sensitive, you wouldn't have been offended." Or we say, "Maybe I could have handled that better than I did." Again, no apology . . . it's just saying, "I wasn't on the top of my game that day." Or we say, "Let's let bygones be bygones" which isn't a confession and doesn't acknowledge the hurt we caused. Or we offend in person, looking them squarely in the eye . . . but then apologize with an e-mail or text message. Or we try to hide behind euphemisms. We say, "I stretched the truth a little this morning" rather than, "I lied to you." We say, "I just have a bad temper" rather than, "I just sinned against you and was way out of line." Or we say, "I've been under a lot of stress lately." That may be true, but that doesn't give us license to hurt others, and it's certainly no apology.

Until we acknowledge that what we have done is sinful (like David did), until we repent we will not experience relief, or freedom or restoration. The hand will remain heavy upon us.

So when you repent, hold nothing back. Do not confess them wholesale. That's way too easy. Be very specific and get down to the dirty details. You're not

telling the Lord anything he doesn't already know. But occasionally he likes to hear it from our own lips, not because it's good for him. (He doesn't need anything from us.) It must be good for us.

And do not bother to confess your sins unless you're also determined to change your actions. If you don't plan on changing your actions or attitudes, it's like saying, "Lord fix me . . . but not yet." Or, "Lord, forgive me for what I am about to do" which is no repentance at all.

And do not make wimpy or weak confessions to God or anyone else. Do not try to excuse your wrongs. Confess them. Even if you have the sneaking suspicion that your neighbor will not forgive you, confess your sin to him anyway, because it's the right thing to do. You owe that to him.

We will not have the weight of our guilt removed until the Lord lifts it from our shoulders. And isn't that where Lent is pointing us . . . to the cross, where God lifts that bone crushing weight of sin from our shoulders and places it on his beloved Son. The cross is where he takes that heavy hand off of all mankind and presses it down on his Son.

What a gift it is to have this peace with God. In our psalm, David writes, "Blessed (happy) is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity. . ." (v. 1).

So you don't have to be slow to repent because you have a Lord who is quick to forgive.

You don't have to loathe confessing your sin because you have a Lord who loves washing your sin away.

You don't have to hide your sin, because the Lord wants to be your hiding place, sin and all.

You don't have to shrink or stoop under the weight of your sin, because Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest."

You don't have to cover over your sin with lies and deception, because you already wear Christ's cloak of righteousness you received in baptism.

You don't have to groan and frown; you can sing and smile, because blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven.

When you keep silent, your bones waste away. When you confess your transgressions to the LORD" he forgives the iniquity of your sin.

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Amen.

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