

There's a story from many years ago, about a little boy who lived out in the country, on a farm in the Midwest. Now this was back in the day before indoor plumbing and so his family had to use an outhouse. And if you've never seen one, picture a porta-potty made of wood.

Well this boy hated it.

He hated it because it was hot in the summer, and cold in the winter, and it stunk all the time.

The outhouse sat on the bank of a creek and the boy sometimes contemplated pushing their outhouse over the edge and into the creek. Well, one afternoon, after a hard spring rain, the little creek had become so swollen, that the boy decided it was his perfect chance to get rid of the much hated outhouse. So he got an old two-by-four from the barn and he used it as a giant crowbar, prying and pushing until the outhouse toppled into the creek and floated away.

The boy wondered how long it would be before the "outhouse hit the fan," so to speak and it didn't take long.

That evening his dad told him they were going to have a talk after supper.

Weighing his options, the boy decided to play innocent and asked why?

His father replied, "Someone pushed the outhouse into the creek today and I think it was you.

The boy thought for a moment, switched strategies, and decided to confess, "Yes, dad it was me,"

After a quiet pause, he continued. "Dad, I read in school last week that George Washington chopped down a cherry tree and didn't get into trouble because he told the truth."

His dad replied, "Well, son, George Washington's father wasn't in that cherry tree!"

While you may never have pushed an outhouse into a creek with your dad in it, all of us can identify with that story in at least three ways:

First, there is something inside us that wants to do things our own way, no matter what the consequences. The Bible refers to this as the realm of our "sinful nature" or "our flesh."

Second, our lack of obedience to God, affects other people, not just us. We know that's true because most of us have been in a few outhouses that have been pushed over by other people. Finally, none of us get away with keeping our sinful acts secret.

In fact, we often end up sinning more when we try to lie and cover up our bad choices.

When David became King, initially everything seemed to go his way. Under his leadership, Israel began to win victories over neighboring armies, including twice defeating the Philistines and freeing Jerusalem from the iron hand of the Jebusites. After an impressive victory over the Arameans, all the other kings who supported the Arameans surrendered and make peace with Israel.

But David is more than a great military and diplomatic leader. Remember he was chosen as king because of his heart for God. And it is his tender heart that allows David to lead his people spiritually as well.

Under his leadership, the ark of the covenant is returned to Jerusalem. And do you remember David's joy as he danced as the ark entered Jerusalem? He was so full of love for God that he was completely uninhibited in his dancing.

Now Jerusalem becomes not only the capital of Israel but its spiritual capital as well. All because of David's heart is for God.

David had come a long way since his days as a shepherd boy. That is until he decided to topple the outhouse.

For reasons we can only speculate about, David stayed home one spring when his army went off to war. And he decided to take a stroll on the palace roof overlooking the city. And he sees a beautiful woman named, Bathsheba, and gives in to his lust.

Sin always involves three things:

1. Temptation
2. Opportunity
3. And weakness.

And the reality is, that every day we all face temptations. And sometimes when we haven't guarded our heart, we leave ourselves open to opportunities. Unguarded moments, in places we should never be.

And on top of that, is our human weakness. There is not a one of us, who can make ourselves strong.

When we are honest and humble enough to admit it, given the right circumstances, we can rationalize, and justify, and talk ourselves into almost anything.

Sometimes that's a long road, a road, that may include a time when we have been hurt in the past and we didn't know what to do with our pain. Or we made bad choices after we were hurt.

Sometimes we bury that pain, and we don't find a health outlet or we don't seek healing. Other times, we create the pain with our own sense of entitlement. "I deserve this" we convince ourselves.

I won't presume to know what David was thinking, but in all my years as a pastor, I've never met anyone who jumped into a pot of boiling water.

I've never met anyone who woke up one morning and declared to himself or herself, "I'm going to ruin my marriage today."

"I've never met a businessman or woman who just out of the blue decided to embezzle money from their company.

I've never met anyone who decided that addiction to drugs or alcohol looked like a good choice.

But sadly, I've met people who have lost their marriages their businesses, and their sobriety. And in talking to them, they would say, "I didn't see it coming. The water didn't seem too hot at first."

In our Lower Story lives, it can seem like something is innocent. It can seem like God's commandments can be bent a little here and a little there, and if no one finds out, what is the harm?

God gives us a conscience, but our conscience is malleable.

It can be informed by the Holy Spirit or it can be shaped by messages we pick up from this world around us. If you watch enough primetime TV or cable, or you just listen to enough bad advice from friends, all of us can end up with a warped sense of right and wrong.

You see, our conscience is like a GPS device for navigation. It can be programmed with good information or bad. And if we just go by our inner GPS, our feelings, well... they can lead us astray.

But God doesn't leave us at the mercy of our feelings.

God speaks to us.

Just like God spoke to David.

David's sin may be different from your sin or mine. But all sin has the same source.

Everything that divides us from God, starts with one thing.
It starts with a heart that is worshipping something other than God.

Martin Luther said our heart is an “idol factory.” We are very easily tempted to worship things other than God.

That’s our human nature.

So when temptation meets opportunity AND our human weakness
look out... it’s only a matter of time before the outhouse will be toppled.

But remember God doesn’t leave us at the mercy of our feelings.

God speaks to us.

And during this Advent season God speaks to us through these words from Scripture:

Watch

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”¹

When we watch and listen to God, and pray, God will strength us to resist temptation.

Keep awake

So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.²

Remember then what you received and heard; treasure the Gospel, and repent.
If you will not awake, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.³

In the same way, the Holy Spirit spoke to David through the prophet Nathan.

He said to David:

There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, ³but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

⁴“Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”

And what did David say?

He burned with anger against this heartless rich man, didn't he?
 He could see the injustice.
 He could feel the pain of the poor man who lost his beloved lamb

When I was in middle school and High School, our family had a dog named Lady.
 Lady would do everything with me.
 I would throw her a tennis ball in the yard, and she would bring it right back.
 In fact, she always wanted to play that game until my arm was tired.
 She would go along with me on my paper route and she would sleep on my bed.

We loved Lady.

And if someone had come and taken Lady from me and killed her I would have been just as angry as David.

But just when David, wanted to take justice into his own hands Nathan said the words that cut to his heart:

David, "you are the man!"

You are the one who has sinned against God.

You are the one who deserves the punishment you would impose on others.

As I was preparing this sermon and reflecting on the story this week, it struck me very clearly that not one of us truly understands this story unless we realize God is speaking to us, and saying "You...you are the one who has sinned against me."

In big and small ways every one of us has sinned and fall short of the glory of God.⁴

And whenever we start to feel self-righteous
 and we start looking down on someone else and their sin,
 remember how Jesus spoke to the Pharisees who were hypocritical and loved to judge others.
 Jesus always saved his harshest words of judgment for them.

And remember the saying, "But for the grace of God, there go I."

What are the key words in the center of that phrase?

"But for the **Grace** of God!

When temptation meets opportunity and our weakness, what do we need?

We need God! We need God's strength. We need God's wisdom!
We need Christian friends who strengthen us.

Friends who will speak truth into our lives. Not friends who encourage us in our sin.

Friends who speak like Paul spoke to the Corinthians, when he said:

"Therefore let anyone who thinks that they stand take heed lest they fall.
No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to all. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."⁵

When David heard Nathan's prophetic word, "You are the man"
David's heart was pierced.
And we heard his poignant prayer of confession in Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right^[b] spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing^[c] spirit.

And God did restore David just as he restores us. God does not cast us away.

God is in the healing and mending business.

God does not scorn us with shame, but lifts us up in hope.

Hope for a new day.

Hope for a redeemed future.

Hope that overflows into the lives of others
when we make amends for the past
repenting and seeking their forgiveness.

And hope that motivates us to reach out to help restore the lives of others.
remembering Jesus' words: "the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little,
but the one who is forgiven much, shows great love."⁶

Thankful for God's forgiveness in our own lives
Let us show great love. Amen

¹ **Matthew 26:41**

² **1 Thessalonians 5:6**

³ **Revelation 3:3**

⁴ **Romans 3:23**

⁵ **1 Corinthians 10:12-13**

⁶ **Luke 7:46**