

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Old Testament, Year C

YOU ARE THE MAN

2 Samuel 11:26–12:10, 13-15

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 6)

Analysis by Bill White

When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. ²⁷ When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.

But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, ¹² ¹ and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. ² The rich man had very many flocks and herds; ³ but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴ Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." ⁵ Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; ⁶ he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

⁷ Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; ⁸ I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. ⁹ Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰ Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. ¹³ David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan said to David, "Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die." ¹⁵ Then Nathan went to his house.

DIAGNOSIS: Condemned by the Law

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Lawbreaker

"But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord" (2 Sam. 11:27b). What is it that David has done that displeased the Lord? King David has despised the word of the Lord and done evil in God's sight. He committed adultery with the wife of Uriah the Hittite and then murdered her husband (2 Sam. 12:9). The great King David has blatantly and egregiously violated two of God's Ten Commandments and the Lord is not pleased. Perhaps David thinks, "How can I break the law? I am the law!"

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Idolater

What's worse is what underlies these acts. David's behavior reveals his belief that he is above and beyond God's Law. He is the king. He can do whatever he wants, whenever he wants, and have whatever he desires. He need not fear, love, nor trust anyone or anything other than himself. Certainly there is no evidence of faith in the one, true God.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Deserving the Death Penalty

King David has been living a life apart from faith in God. In fact, he's been thinking and acting as if he believes himself to be a god. Ironically, when Nathan tells David his parable the king pronounces his own death sentence: "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die" (2 Sam. 12:5b).

There are indeed consequences to this sin. This idolatry brings God's judgment and condemnation: "You are the man!" (2 Sam. 12:7). "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife" (2 Sam. 12:10). "Thus says the Lord: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun" (2 Sam. 12:11-12, omitted in the pericope). David is right about one thing: under the Law the penalty for his sins is death.

PROGNOSIS: Saved by Grace through Faith

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Death Sentences Commuted

But Almighty God, the perfectly just judge and the God of the Ten Commandments, is also the God of grace and mercy. God's gracious care of David has been generous and is ongoing. God had anointed David king, delivered him from Saul, given him Saul's house and wives, and made David king of Judah and Israel (2 Sam. 12:7b-8). And God will continue his gracious care of David. "Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die" (2 Sam. 12:14b).

Best of all, from the house of David God will embody his perfectly gracious care in the person of Jesus Christ. By the death on the cross of his Son Jesus, God will make possible the putting away of sin and the commuting of the death penalty for all humankind. And by his glorious resurrection from the dead, God will offer forgiveness and new life through faith. Yes, there are consequences to sin, but there is also gracious care, mercy, forgiveness, and new life in Christ.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Faith Empowers Confession and Absolution

Through Nathan, God's Law is heard clearly by David. This knowledge of his sin before God moves David to confess, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:13a), and immediately Nathan speaks God's word of absolution to him, "Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die" (2 Sam. 12:13b). The power of God's word of grace and forgiveness replaces David's idolatrous faith in himself with real faith in the one true God.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Faith Sustains and Blesses Daily Life

This true faith in God will sustain David in the days ahead, enabling him to endure the terrible consequences of his sin. "Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die" (2 Sam. 12:14;

see also 12:15-23). And in short order, the God of love and mercy again provides his gracious care to King David. Soon there is another blessing, another baby, Solomon (2 Sam. 12:24-25). The turbulent events and painful experiences will continue for King David. But he will be sustained by God's gracious gift of faith.