



“And The Truth Shall Set You Free”

2 Samuel 11: 26-12: 13a

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It may be too late to recommend some summer beach reading, but if you want to read about handsome shepherds, kings, prophets, adultery, murder, friendship, great escapes and the slaying of a giant, open your Bible to 1 Samuel 17 and begin. Today’s particular scripture reading drops us right in the middle of this amazing story. To briefly summarize, David, a handsome young shepherd boy from a regular family, is chosen by God to be king. He kills Goliath the giant in battle with a rock from his slingshot. He rises up to replace Saul as King of God’s people and rules the land. David has multiple wives and concubines and riches beyond measure. One day he sees Bathsheba, a married woman, bathing on her roof. He wants her so he sends for her. She becomes pregnant from their tryst and David has Bathsheba’s husband killed to cover up his adultery. Adultery and murder—and David doesn’t appear to be feeling “sheepish” about any of these terrible things he’s done. We join the story shortly after Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, has been killed.

(Read 2 Samuel 11: 26-12:13a)

Dave, I need your opinion. Tell me the truth. I just bought this outfit. Does it make me look fat?

Oh, we all know that that is just so wrong! That is the ultimate example of a question with a no-win answer. Am I too old to wear this? Do I look tired? Anyone with ANY experience in a relationship knows that rather than answer that question, rather than tell the truth--the smart move is to skulk into the next room.

Raise your hand if you were taught as a child to “always tell the truth.” I know I was! I also know I got into serious trouble when I told too much of the truth. In fact, though we are initially taught to **always** tell the truth, the rest of our childhood is spent learning to sometimes avoid the truth. We are told it’s important to “mind our own business.”

Sometimes that’s best because some truths can really hurt. I’ll never forget June of 1994. I took a shower, put on some makeup and a decent outfit, and drove to the Publix on Johnson’s Ferry. I left my two month old son at home with his grandmother. I cranked the radio on the way, feeling

free and light and breezy. For the first time since April 5th I didn't have baby spit up on my shoulder. I even felt kinda peppy and cute. After getting all the items on my grocery list I pushed my cart up to the checkout and began unloading. It was at that moment that the bag boy said, "Good morning! Hey—congratulations. When are you due?"

Ouch! Sometimes, the truth hurts. That's why scripture tells us HOW to tell the truth: Ephesians 4:15 says, "Speak the truth in love." The truth spoken in love is essential for a healthy relationship. Not petty, harmful, spite filled truth, but honesty about what really matters. That's true for our relationships between one another and our relationship with God.

The Bible as a whole is really one big giant relationship book. It tells us we are created and claimed by God. You might say we are on God's team. Any sports fan worth his salt can tell you that there is no "I" in team: it's the relationship between teammates that's essential to success. God's team even has a team motto. "Now you are the body of Christ and each of you is a part of it." (1 Cor 12: 27) As part of one body, we have to be honest to make things work. We must **speak** the truth, we must **listen** to the truth, and we must **claim** the truth for ourselves.

We must **speak** the truth –in love—to others. If you admire a quality in someone, for goodness sake, tell them! Tell Kathleen Webb she has a great laugh, tell Zeta Galbreath her individual style inspires you, tell Dale Murphy his steady, gentle demeanor gives you a sense of calm. If Beth Fallaize's artistry brings you joy every time you see it, remind her how much her talent means to others.

Other times speaking the truth in love is difficult. If you have been hurt deeply by someone or you suspect you have caused pain —speak that truth in love to them. Express your vulnerability or offer an apology so the two of you can make things right. It takes courage and humility to tell this kind of truth—to name sin—but when we are grounded in Christ, it is possible. If we desire to be in right relationship, it is essential. It is life giving.

Public Service Announcement: Please hear this. Speaking the truth in love is not an excuse to tell someone else everything that you think they are doing wrong and how they need to fix it. Doing that will earn you a t-shirt. **That** is just being a bossy know-it-all. You'll qualify for a t-shirt but you'll alienate everyone you know. Save that approach for the guy screaming on the street corner that we are all "sinners doomed to hell unless we repent!" Speaking the truth in love is grounded in kindness and caring and says, "I love you enough to pay attention and not walk away from this." **Speak** the truth in love.

We also must **listen** for the truth. Remember Dr. David Bartlett who preached at my ordination last December? When he states his opinion he follows it with this disclaimer: "Remember, I usually have coffee with people who read the same things I read, so know that my opinion is not

the only opinion.” In other words, to **listen** for the truth we need to move beyond our small circle. When you walk into your daughter’s new classroom, why not drift over to a parent you’ve never met and talk to them? Or dare to take a seat in your high school English class next to a new kid. Intentionally engage people different from you. Switch the channel from ABC to PBS to FOX to the BBC and then back again. Read the entire editorial page, not just the column “from the left” or “from the right.” Know that there is some truth in almost everything. We as people of God are called to **seek** the truth by listening to a variety of voices.

Episcopal priest and author Barbara Brown Taylor recognizes how important truth is to relationship. Writing about the success of Alcoholics Anonymous she says, “[T]here are so few places in the world where people agree to tell the truth like that, and where the truth works the miracle of change.”¹

Let’s return to scripture. Scripture is chock full of truth if we are willing to seek it. Sometimes it’s direct: “Thou shalt not kill.” Other times the truth is more hidden, like in the parables Jesus tells. In today’s story Nathan tries the parable approach but when it doesn’t work he gets direct with King David.

Before Nathan walks into the room, King David is surrounded only by “yes men.” He rules a kingdom with unchecked power and no one dare disagree with him. Like the Queen of Palm Beach from today’s children’s sermon, he is fancy on the outside but not so beautiful inside. He slept with a married woman and had her husband killed but he doesn’t recognize his sins. King David had no one to tell him the truth in his life-- so God sends Nathan to set him straight. To speak truth to power.

Do you have a truth teller in your life? Someone you trust, that has no ulterior motive other than wanting a full life for you? Maybe it’s a childhood friend or a member of this congregation? My prayer is you can find that kind of person in this church. They can point out strengths you’d never recognize in yourself . . . and they can warn you when you are oblivious to the reality of your own sin. God sends each of us truth tellers—but we need to watch for them.

The specific scripture that the church urges us to study today ends in the middle of a verse—that “a” next to the number 13 in the bulletin is not a typo. Listen to verse 13a: “David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the LORD.’” This story includes the death of a beloved pet, a demand for a man’s life and Nathan’s declaration to the King. Yet the assigned scripture ends mid-verse with David saying “I have sinned against the LORD.” That’s it. Microphone drop. Why?

Because King David admitting the truth of his sins *is the most dramatic point in the story.*

I'm always looking for common ground with my college kid, so when he handed me this book in May I begrudgingly read a play Sophocles wrote 500 years BEFORE Christ was born. *Oedipus the King* is “universally recognized as **the** dramatic masterpiece of the Greek theater.”ⁱⁱ Have you heard of Oedipus? He’s the guy that mistakenly kills his father and marries his mother. Ewww, right? Those sins make you cringe. And yet the focal point of this drama isn’t on murder or incest but on the *moment when Oedipus discovers these sins*.ⁱⁱⁱ

Dr. Sigmund Freud suggested that “[T]he story of King Oedipus . . . moves us only because it might have been ours.”^{iv} As Oedipus discovers his fundamental ignorance of the truth, we recognize how little of the truth we know and realize maybe we don’t ever WANT to know. But Oedipus faces his sins head on. *King Oedipus is a hero because of his dedication to searching for the truth and naming it.*

In our scripture this week, King David isn’t looking for the truth, and he doesn’t recognize it when it is right in front of him. (Is that like us?) Nathan has to yell, “HELLO!!! YOU are the man!” No, King David is not very heroic . . . until verse 13a when he admits, “I have sinned against the LORD.”

Did you hear that? *Just recognizing and admitting the truth can be heroic.* Admitting to ourselves and to God what we have done wrong is TOUGH. It’s HARD. And it is what Jesus invites us to do.

The Latin root of the word “salvation” is “salus” which means health. Truth is the basis for a healthy relationship. It is where salvation begins. Admitting the truth is—amazingly--the beginning of heroism. At Pleasant Hill we recognize making that heroic claim may be easier when you do it side by side with other disciples. Before we turn to the celebration of communion, let’s stand together to declare the truth and confess our sins before God.

Amen.

ⁱ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Speaking of Sin: The Lost Language of Salvation*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2000, page 57.

ⁱⁱ Bernard Knox in Robert Fagles (trans), *Sophocles: The Three Theban Plays*. New York: Penguin Books, 1982, page 131.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Ibid, 132.

