

NOT ME

When we judge ourselves..... we are all innocent..... or forgiven.

I've talked with people who have served with CPT in the West Bank / the occupied area of Palestine where the Israelis have been settling – taking land from the Palestinians. I also have a couple of friends who are Palestinian. The stories and the reports that I heard about how Israel is treating their neighbours are horrific.

?How can this be? How can the Jewish people who formed Israel do such things, considering their long and tragic history of being abused and persecuted????

We humans are peculiar creatures: When the abused gain power then they tend to abuse. You'd think it wouldn't work that way, but it does.

Through out history, it has happened that way..... how very strange???

Of course, we Canadians wouldn't do such a thing. True, we didn't treat the aboriginals very well, but we've changed / we know better????

Yet, most standard culture Canadians, those who are three or more generations removed from their poor and powerless immigrant relatives, NOW.. arrogantly belittle and castigate newer immigrants.

I guess.... we forgot our past????..... or.... perhaps the impetus for abuse is the fear of that abuse returning????

No doubt, We Mennonites, now that we are comfortable and powerful, NOW that we've arrived... WE would Never forget our humble past.

We know better..... we won't forget..... NO, NO not us.

I recall, lean times when I was a child growing up. We did without a lot of extras, and when my parents bought juice, they would dilute it with about 50% water, to make it go farther.

*I vowed to never to that when I grew up, and I don't.*

Occasionally, for a very special treat, we could get out for ice cream. We would dine with royalty—the Dairy Queen. I remember thinking, while slurping down my luxurious banana split, that no one would guess that we drank watered down juice at home.

Two weeks ago, while travelling the two lanes highway across Western Ontario, I got stuck behind a beat up old min-van full of people and kids. They were barely doing 75, and..... I harrumphed thinking, “Good grief, why don't they get a decent van that can at least go the speed limit?”

How Easy it is to forget..... I didn't know them or their story, yet I devalued and judged them..... NO..... NOT.... me.....

King David lost perspective and apparently his memory.....

In today's story, David demonstrated another one of our peculiar tendencies, which is: when we forget our past and all that God has done for us, ...we tend to be dissatisfied. In other words, when we do get what we want, then we want what we don't have.

David was the King. It seems that no one was willing to remind him of his humble past – no one warned him.

*Last Sunday, another David - David Feick, presented the King David and Bathsheba story. Since, I don't believe today's text can stand alone with out the Bathsheba incident, I'll include both, and I hope it's not too redundant.*

The story begins by saying, “In the Spring of the year, the time when Kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, his general..... out with the army.” .... BUT, David stayed behind!  
I suppose, David was NOW too “special” to go and do what Kings were expected to do.... which is: lead the army into Battle. In those days, the King lead the army. .... but David had changed the rules / he had changed.

At one time, David was the apple in God's eye. At one time, David was a lowly, poor shepherd boy,.... but all that had changed. David had changed..... He had “arrived”. He had money, position and power.

One afternoon, David was sitting on his couch surfing the channels, and he was not finding anything to watch, so he decided to go up on the roof to see what could be seen.... and to cool off in the breeze.  
*The houses in those days had flat roofs, and it was common for people to use the roofs.*

Since, David's palace was higher than anyone's house, he had a great view, and the view was really interesting, that afternoon.

David's vision focussed on a nearby roof: a woman was out sun bathing. She thought she had privacy, and didn't consider that the King would be home while all the other men were off with the army.

David Forgot! He forgot so much,.....he even forgot that he was married, and .....who could, who would remind him?

He petitioned one of his servants to go find out about this woman. The report came back that her name was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, a Hittite.

Knowing that Uriah was away with the army, David had his servants Go and GET her. He could do that..... He was the King, after all. He was above protocol.

David succumbed to Lust and envy. And, when lust and envy is turned on, it will short circuit the brain, every time. Rational thinking is blocked

*A brief digression: we must educate ourselves and our youth to the power of lust and envy. We need community to do this, and we need to be clear and bold about our message, too,... and not be afraid to talk about sex and greed.*

Back to the story:

A victim of power and position, Bathsheba slept with David,.... and David thought it was mutual, BUT....IT WASN'T.

So far, Bathsheba hasn't said a word: She is without voice. She is powerless, a subject of the king, and David took advantage of her.  
He used her, and sent her away.  
*An Intimate relationship Must be with an equal partner!*

Six weeks later, she does speak,..... to present reality / consequences by saying, "I AM Pregnant."

*We humans truly are strange creations.* When our iniquity unravels and exposes us, we become **Stupid**. It seems when we get caught that the lust and greed has burned up our ability for rational thought.

Whatever the reason, we become stupid. We try to cover up. We try to make a Wrong into a good: tapes get erased, words are redefined, excuses are fabricated, such as the Gov. of South Carolina asserting that he was going on a solitary trip to ease the stress.  
And, in this situation, the husband is quickly called home from battle, so that he will sleep with his wife, and make everything appear okay.

The real stupid part is that even in those days, they could do the math. They knew the length of gestation.

Also, quite strange is the fact that King David broke some big rules; **he sinned**, Yet now he wants things to appear pure and innocent. Before, he acted as a King above the rules, and now suddenly he is concerned about the rules? ????? I wonder why that is?.....

David calls Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, home from the battlefield and invites him to the mansion for a visit.

Nervous and perplexed, Uriah enters David's mansion. David, with flowing arms as if for an old friend, greets Uriah, and invites him to supper. David energetically pumps Uriah with questions about the battle scene.

Uriah cautiously answers, wondering what in blazes is going on. He can't figure out why a he, a lowly Hittite, is the guest of the King of Israel.

Then, with a patronizing pat on the back, David tells Uriah, "Thanks for sharing all the news, NOW, GO to your wife. You've been gone a long time. Go enjoy the company of your wife.

But, Uriah did not, and instead he spent the night sleeping where the King's servants slept. He knew his place.

The next day, word got back to David about the "military man" who slept with the domestic staff. Befuddled, David called again for Uriah and asked him, "I don't get it, why didn't you spend the night with your wife?"

*David should have know why,.... but he forgot.*

Uriah explained what David should have remembered, .... that the ethics / the rules for those in service to God and King demanded that **Pleasures** are foregone until the task is completed.

*Imagine,..... a foreigner of low stature, lecturing the Hebrew King about cultural ethics.*

*The Bible presents leaders very honestly – painfully transparent.*

So,... David tries to cover up his “personal” disappointment with foiled plans, and paints on a big smile. Grinning to Uriah, he invites him to stay for supper. BUT, the guilt is starting to seep through the facade, and Uriah is beginning to put the pieces together.

That evening, David gets Uriah drunk, and then points him in the direction of Uriah’s home. Thinking his conniving plan was successful, David turns in for the night. BUT, Uriah did NOT go to his wife, but instead stuck to his ethics and higher calling.

The following morning, David is again informed about Uriah, and Again sends for him. However, this time, David’s contenance is cold and detached. Uriah is not surprised, and presents himself as a silent, loyal subject.

With royal, haughty dispatch, David hands a note to Uriah and instructs him to return to the battle scene and to hand the note to his general, Joab. Without a word, Uriah is faithful, ...unaware that the note directs Joab to send Uriah to his death by abandoning him in a dangerous battle situation.

*David’s web to deceive* has turned terribly ugly. Sin..., without confession and repentance, has a tendency to evolve into evil and to join the demonic. David’s plot is to Murder Uriah so that David can appear honourable in taking Bathsheba as his wife.

Joab does as his is commanded. Uriah is sent out with the troops to assault the defenders’ fortified wall. Many other innocents die in the process.... before they can withdraw and leave Uriah to the receive the rain of violence that kills him. War is like that.....

War is the temple for greed and lust, and death and destruction is indiscriminate in the tempest of violence and evil.

With the bodies accounted for and the scene reeking of death, Joab prepares his messenger on how to report the grisly battle to David.

The messenger travels back to Jerusalem, and humbly presents the report to David. With quick, precise words he relates: – we attacked the walls of the city – their archers were vicious and accurate – many died in the assault before we withdrew,.....and.... it was a foolish plan – we knew about the archers, ... and.... and..... and, *turning his shoulder as if to cushion a severe blow*, he added, your servant Uriah is dead.

Instead of anger at the disastrous tactics, David pats him on the head, and tells the messenger to tell Joab to NOT be discouraged, and nonchalantly adds, “casualties happen.”  
*It is easy for politicians to lead a war.*

Of course, Bethsheba was visited by a military official bearing the news of her husband’s unfortunate death. She grieved and made lamentations.

Following the designated allotment for mourning, David sent for her, and she was brought to his house, and he Made her his wife.

In time, ... David's army was victorious, Bathsheba gave birth to a son, and David's past transgressions seemed to be forgotten – as if they never happened.

\*BUT, all is NOT forgotten.

And, God had NOT forgotten the sins of David.

After a bit, Nathan was sent by God to visit David.

Nathan strolled into David's mansion, and they both sat down in over stuffed chairs and chatted for a while.

During a calm in the chatter, Nathan spoke up saying, "OH,... there is an incident that I wanted to share with you.

There were two men in this little town, one was very rich and the other was very poor.

The rich man had many herds of sheep, and the poor man owned only one ewe (female lamb) that was the family's dear pet and companion.

In fact, the family would play with the lamb and share their meals with her. She was like a member of the family. She would even sleep on the lap of the poor man.

One day, a traveller came to visit the rich man, and the rich man wanted to prepare a fine meal for his friend, but he didn't want to bear the expense of using one of his own sheep.

So, he went and TOOK the poor man's dear little lamb, slaughtered it and served it to his guest."

IMMEDIATELY, David raised forward in his chair and bellowed out,

"As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to DIE! The poor man should be compensated four fold. And, how dare the rich man, HE HAS NO Pity. HE DESERVES TO DIE!"

Nathan slowly pulled himself out of the chair, stood before David, raising a pointed finger and cogently said,

"YOU ARE THAT MAN, THUS SAYS THE LORD, THE GOD OF ISRAEL."

Nathan continues, and points out all the transgressions that David thought had been forgotten,..... and he points out the consequences, too.

////God confronts David, and David's sins and guilt are all exposed!

It is always painful when God confronts us with our sins,.... always!

We can choose to acknowledge the truth, recalling our transgressions.... or .... we can continue the denial, claiming, "NOT ME."

David chose to remember. Painfully, he remembered, crying out, "I have sinned against the Lord."

Sin is much more than breaking some cultural rules. Sin is what breaks wholeness – what hurts our connection with God, others and creation. Sin is destruction, and choosing to sin is choosing to walk away from God, and with that comes consequences beyond our own aloneness.

In David's case, many innocent people suffered and died because of his transgressions, including his new son. That is usually the case with sin, the innocent often suffer the most.

David lived on..... carrying the burden of his iniquities.  
*Grace was not fully understood in those days...of living under the law.*  
Even today, many people struggle to accept grace.

Forgiveness and Grace are not earned,.... nor can they be paid for. No amount of sacrifices could atone for David's sins.

Sin breaks wholeness. Forgiveness and Grace restores wholeness, and the process is done in community with God – our social community and with our creation community.

The steps begin with confessing and repenting, and repenting is changing / changing directions / changing self and choosing to walk with God. Forgiveness is a process with God and community.

Grace is a gift from love for Love. Grace restores the love lost in the break up of wholeness. Grace is divine. Grace is like a healing medicine that invites us to be gentle with ourselves and with others.

Grace is God's touch,..... and... Grace gives us a memory.  
Grace reminds us of our past—where we have been, who we were and where we are heading.  
Grace gives back our honest memory.

David made choices to break from his community, to be separate and above others. And, in his aloneness he no longer receive counsel and he lost touch with God, too. More poor choices followed.

David faltered because he was all alone.

By the Grace of God, Nathan invited David back into community and to return to his journey with God.

Of course we need God, BUT we also desperately need each other. We need church. We need guidance from each other; we need encouragement, and, at times, we need counsel, too.

\* Church is NOT a social club. Church is a serious relationship.

We are in a covenant with each other to hold ourselves together in wholeness –living and being peace and justice.

We Need each other to survive! We are not in this relationship on a whim, to appease our own interests or to coddle our pride. Church is NOT about ME, but rather about US and God.

We must humbly and faithful do church in truth!

AND, when we falter, we also NEED GRACE. We must be gracious to each other and to ourselves, as God is gracious.

Let us gently, yet fervently help each other.....with God's help.

And, let us say the closing prayer together: reading the Ephesians passage as printed in your bulletin:  
“For this reasons, I bow my knees.....”