

From The Pastor

The dance of sin and repentance is a tenuous one. To reap the fruit of repentance demands the honest admission of guilt in the offense of love. Today's readings point out why the challenge of repentance and its freedom can be long in coming.

The prophet Nathan is God's truth-sayer for David. Nathan has the unenviable task of pointing out to David the deep offense and injustice of his sin. Prior to this confronting information, David is undoubtedly aware of his sin, yet he fails to feel or accept its full weight. He knows he has done wrong by conceiving a child with Bathsheba while her husband Uriah is on the front lines of war. Consistent with human nature, we can understand that David rationalizes his sin as 'not that bad'. He is after all the king chosen by the Lord, and his power has gone to his head.

Only after Nathan, at the behest of God, has pointed out the murder of his friend and faithful soldier, does David feel the weight of his offense. God points out all that he has done for David, and that he has long been favored by God. Reminded of God's favor and fidelity, David is stung in his heart by the depth of his offense.

Clearly and honestly David confesses his guilt before the Lord. Although there will be inevitable consequences of his actions, Nathan consoles David with a word of God's forgiveness. Nathan conveys to David, because you have confessed and admitted your offense to the Lord, God will not abandon you, but you will survive.

One definition of sin is to forget God, to forget the goodness of God's love and favor. In the forgetting, we act outside of love and fail to recognize what we are doing. We can easily justify our behaviors and offenses with any number of delusions and rationalizations. Only when we are reminded of God's love for us do we feel the tension of our offenses, and are confronted with the decision to change our ways.

This decision will never come if we are closed to the reality of love and the justice of mercy that are rooted in God. This is the nature of the offense in the gospel story. It is familiar to us, but it is also timeless and inclusive. In the story, the man's name is Simon, but he represents many across all ages.

The woman in the story has received forgiveness and it has set her on a path of great love. Jesus does not forgive her sins, whatever they might be, because she has shown him a great act of kindness. Only in the experience of having being forgiven is she inspired to offer the abundance of love she showers upon him. Thus, because her many sins have been forgiven she is free to show so great a love, and she does not hesitate to do so.

This is not the case with Simon. Simon is not a person who lives with a lot of love. Love is not the standard or measure of how or where he finds validation and peace. Love is too risky and prone to trouble making. Simon lives by the standard of the law. This is his box, and he has it well under control. Simon is justified by a measure of his own making. He is so blinded by the fear of some mistake or divine offense that he has worked the truth of God completely out of his life.

Jesus is a threat to Simon's way of justification. Therefore, Jesus must be watched and measured for evaluation and judgment. Simon fails, or refuses to accept the repentance that Jesus preaches. Repentance and forgiveness are not a part of his way of being. He is divided in himself and from himself.

Because Simon lives the way he does, he fails to understand the nature of repentance and forgiveness. Self-justified by the law, Simon is quite unconscious to the fact that he could possibly be offending God. In his mind, he has never been in debt to God, and not likely to anyone else. We learn this in the painfully obvious example Jesus proposes. Who would be more grateful of the two: he who is forgiven five-hundred days wages, or fifty? The response comes, "I *suppose* he who was forgiven the greater amount".

The greatest sinners who have faced their offenses and confessed them to the Lord are always the ones who are most grateful to God for the gift of mercy. For Jesus it is not so much about the sin, but the sinner who repents. Our sins do not keep us from God near as much as our blindness and walls against the love God wants to give us.

Simon does not see his sins in the same way that he fails to see the woman. He sees a kind of a woman, a sinner who could be nothing like him. This is why Jesus says to him, "Simon, do you see this woman"? He does not see her. Nor does he see himself. He thinks he sees himself, and he likes what he sees. He does not see reality. As such, he is bound up in his self-made box that refuses the forgiveness of Jesus. Love and mercy are more than he can handle. Such a person is stuck and unavailable for the Kingdom of God. Countless sins have been forgiven in this world, except those sins that refuse to be faced and admitted. The forgiveness is free and available, but refused by so many. Let us not have that be true among us.

