

**“The Equipment of the Church”
Psalm 51
The Confession of 1967 9.50
Sermon #93
Lent 5
54th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic
3.21.21**

Psalm 51

For the music leader. A psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him just after he had been with Bathsheba.

1 Have mercy on me, God, according to your faithful love!

Wipe away my wrongdoings according to your great compassion!

2 Wash me completely clean of my guilt;

purify me from my sin!

3 Because I know my wrongdoings,

my sin is always right in front of me.

4 I've sinned against you—you alone.

I've committed evil in your sight.

That's why you are justified when you render your verdict,

completely correct when you issue your judgment.

5 Yes, I was born in guilt, in sin,

from the moment my mother conceived me.

6 And yes, you want truth in the most hidden places;

you teach me wisdom in the most secret space.

7 Purify me with hyssop and I will be clean;

wash me and I will be whiter than snow.

8 Let me hear joy and celebration again;

let the bones you crushed rejoice once more.

9 Hide your face from my sins;

wipe away all my guilty deeds!

10 Create a clean heart for me, God;

put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me!

11 Please don't throw me out of your presence;

please don't take your holy spirit away from me.

12 Return the joy of your salvation to me

and sustain me with a willing spirit.

13 Then I will teach wrongdoers your ways,

and sinners will come back to you.

14 Deliver me from violence, God, God of my salvation,

so that my tongue can sing of your righteousness.

15 Lord, open my lips,

and my mouth will proclaim your praise.

16 You don't want sacrifices.

If I gave an entirely burned offering,

you wouldn't be pleased.

17 A broken spirit is my sacrifice, God.

You won't despise a heart, God, that is broken and crushed.

18 Do good things for Zion by your favor.

Rebuild Jerusalem's walls.

19 Then you will again want sacrifices of righteousness—

entirely burned offerings and complete offerings.

Then bulls will again be sacrificed on your altar.

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God.**

The Confession of 1967 9.50

The church responds to the message of reconciliation in praise and prayer. In that response, it commits itself afresh to its mission, experiences a deepening of faith and obedience, and bears open testimony to the gospel. Adoration of God is acknowledgment of the Creator by the creation. Confession of sin is admission of all men's guilt before God and of their need for his forgiveness. Thanksgiving is rejoicing in God's goodness to all men and in giving for the needs of others. Petitions and intercessions are addressed to God for the continuation of his goodness, the healing of men's ills, and their deliverance from every form of oppression. The arts, especially music and architecture, contribute to the praise and prayer of a

Christian congregation when they help men to look beyond themselves to God and to the world which is the object of his love.

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

I have to be honest with you. King David is not my favorite character. He had everything. He was the leader of God's chosen people. King David had the influence. He had the power. He had the luxury that the monarchy afforded. He was even described as a "man after God's own heart." And he can't seem to keep his hands to himself once he saw Bathsheba.

Do you remember or know the context of this psalm? At a time when the kings went off to war, David stayed behind. He's on the rooftop of the palace and sees Bathsheba taking a bath. He gets all hot and bothered and inquires about her. "She's married to Uriah", the king was informed. David used his position of power and got what he wanted: Sex with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. And then, Bathsheba was pregnant.

David tried to cover it up! He tried to get Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba so the pregnancy could look like it was Uriah and not David. That plan didn't work.

So, what did David do? He set up a trap for Uriah in the heat of battle. Mind you, David has stayed behind when kings would

normally go off to war. In the intense fighting with arrows flying all around the Israelites, David commanded his subordinates to fall back without Uriah knowing and allow him to take the arrows and die.

Thinking he was in the clear, Uriah's widow, Bathsheba, became the king's wife and she bore him a son. Yet, according to 2 Samuel 2:26, what David did was evil in God's eyes.

David would be disciplined. The prophet Nathan, a courageous soul, confronted the king knowing it may cost him his life. Nathan spoke truth to power and called out David for his sin. David was supposed to be better than this. David was supposed to be the model leader after the disaster of King Saul, the first king of the

Israelites. But, it doesn't seem like David could keep his hands to himself.

Thankfully, David showed remorse. The Spirit was obviously working in this broken man and this tragic situation. And in that remorse shown by King David, we were given Psalm 51.

Psalm 51 starts out with a cry for help and it acknowledges the wrongdoings that David has done. It acknowledges the truth. The truth is that all of us, no matter how "put together" we are, all of us were born in guilt and sin. That's part of the human condition going all the way back to Adam and Eve. We can't escape it in this life. But, as David has eloquently written, even when we screw up and

cry for help, God is willing to re-shape us and re-mold us to reflect clean hearts and a joyful spirit.

Clean hearts and joyful spirits are what God gives each of us so we don't continue to do the things that harm others and ourselves.

Clean hearts and joyful spirits are what God lovingly gives us when we genuinely fess up so we don't do the same harmful things. And from those clean hearts and joyful spirits, we get one of the most beautiful psalms: Psalm 51.

Psalm 51 is a prayer. And prayer is something the LORD has equipped the church in order to do ministry. According to C67, prayer is one of several tools we have been given along with preaching, teaching, praise, Baptism, and the LORD's Supper. All

of these tools that have been given to us point to and help us respond to God's work of reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

In section 9.50 of C67, we are told that praise and prayer help us to constantly re-examine our role as ambassadors of reconciliation in a broken world. We, God's own creation, acknowledge and adore God as the Creator. We testify to the Good News of God's love made flesh in Jesus Christ. We declare that it isn't our strength alone that mends broken relationships, but it is the Holy Spirit who does that.

Part of prayer is also the confessing of wrongdoing and acknowledging our reliance on God. It is an important tool in our tool belt.

Confession of sin is admission of all men's guilt before God and of their need for his forgiveness.

David knew this. He may have forgotten it for a bit and Nathan had to remind him of it, but David finally remembered.

As tragic and dysfunctional this situation was, the Spirit used the Prophet Nathan to convict King David of his evil actions. Yet, his evil actions did not have the final say. Yes, even though the family had to deal with the aftermath of David's choices for decades and face the consequences, God still loved David and his family because he was still, warts and all, the apple of God's eye.

Last weekend when the Session had its retreat, a question was posed by one of the leaders: When did God become a warm person for you? I had to sit with that for a minute and I told my small group and, ultimately, everyone else that I didn't grow up with God being a warm person. In my faith tradition as a child, I grew up with God being someone who wanted to beat the crud out of me because I was taught I was worthless and wretched. Instead of taking out the anger on me, Jesus took the beating himself. I was scared of God most of my life and that's why I still gravitate toward God's Son, Jesus Christ. But, it wasn't until ten or so years ago that God became a warm person to me. And after wrestling with Psalm 51, I continue to see more proof that God is compassionate and ready to embrace us with open arms, blemishes and all.

But, it wasn't until I continued to meditate on the end of today's excerpt from C67 that I was able to put into words what I had been feeling for some time.

Petitions and intercessions are addressed to God for the continuation of his goodness, the healing of men's ills, and their deliverance from every form of oppression. The arts, especially music and architecture, contribute to the praise and prayer of a Christian congregation when they help men to look beyond themselves to God and to the world which is the object of his love.

In case you haven't been told or in case you need a reminder as I certainly have needed at many points in my life: This world is the object of God's love. And this world includes you. Shortcomings and all, we are the object of God's love. David certainly was. He may have forgotten it, but he finally remembered. We certainly are

and we may have forgotten it, but may today remind you that no one is beyond the reach of God's love.

Prayer is one of the many tools God has equipped us in order to work toward reconciliation with God, neighbor, and self. It is in prayer that we can be honest with ourselves and with the LORD so that we can correct what we may or may not have done. It is a tool for determining the next steps forward. Prayer is also a gift given to us in order to have a holy conversation with the One who sees us through the lens of love.

Siblings in Christ, trust this Good News!

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. Amen.