

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
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Nathan  
2 Samuel 12**

Well, before I get started I want to say a couple of things. As John Mitchell mentioned, we are going through a difficult time. I am so thankful for the prayers that have surrounded us and so grateful to be part of the receiving ministry of this community. I'm also grateful that I get to jump in and do some little things in ministry. One of the things I get to do is serve on a tiny creative team that brainstorms different sermon series possibilities. I just want to go on record as saying I was totally against this sermon series of the prophets. I thought, they are weird, they are hard to understand, and they say grumpy things. This is summer in Minnesota. I want something uplifting. I figured by this time, we would have preached everybody out of the congregation, so the fact that you are here either means that you are really spiritual or you're gluttons for punishment. But I'm glad you're here and I really am excited to talk about the prophets this morning.

The other thing I want to say is that usually the sermon comes after the offering, but the offering hasn't happened yet. We will be collecting your gifts for the ministry in a minute, but I want to do a little introduction first. I want to ask you, have you ever had somebody speak truth to you and say something that was a little embarrassing or uncomfortable? Maybe your spouse turned to you and said, "Ah, honey, maybe a little breath mint might be a good idea, or a little gum." Or maybe you're sitting at lunch with a friend and they go, "Spinach. In your teeth." Or, somebody tells you that you have your fly unzipped or something like that. These are little things people bring to our attention that are blind spots. They may be a little bit embarrassing or uncomfortable, but there are times when people speak truths to us that can be life changing. They can be crucial conversations.

I want to share this morning about a life-changing conversation that I had. Somebody spoke truth to me and it was huge. Years ago when I had just graduated from college and was back in the Chicago area, I was dating a young man named Rick who was not a Christian. I would describe him as very intellectual, a seeker. He was asking a lot of questions about life and faith, but he was very much a humanist too. He was thinking, "We are going to get to God through our own effort, through our own intellect." We had very stimulating discussions and I was convinced that God was going to use me and Rick was going to become a Christian and was going to come to know Jesus as his Lord and Savior. But he kept deflecting and deflecting.

We had dated for about six months and became more and more serious, and then a guy I knew from college came into town. He was a close friend of mine and I went to O'Hare Airport to pick him up. I was driving back with him and we were talking and catching up. I was going on and on about this guy I was dating. Finally we got to a pause in the conversation and there was silence and my friend said, "Laura, you know, I love you as a brother in Christ and that's why I need to

say this hard thing to you.” He said, “I’ve been listening to you say over and over again how you feel this and that, but I want you to think about what you *know*. You know it says in God’s Word that we are not to be joined with unbelievers. It sounds like this relationship is getting more and more serious and leading toward marriage. I just wonder if this is really God’s best for you? I would encourage you to reflect and pray about this and maybe consider that this isn’t God’s best for you.”

So, I did that. I knew that what my friend said had come from a place of love. I prayed about it for two weeks and just felt torn apart, but in the end, I did break up with Rick. As I look back on that conversation, I believe that hard truth that was spoken to me was God’s greatest protection in the way he used my friend to open my eyes to the sin in my life. John and I have been married now for almost 32 years and I cannot imagine more love or joy in the privilege of being able to partner with somebody like him in ministry. That conversation was a really big deal for me.

Think about in your own life, those times when people have spoken truth to you, whether it was a small conversation or a life-changing one. Maybe you can think back on a time where there was a break-up or you got fired or someone said, “Hey, I think maybe you have a blind spot here. I love you and maybe you’re not aware of it but . . .” And the person said something that was hard to hear. I’ve asked Becky Waters to sing a special song [*Brave*, lyrics by Jack Antonoff and Sara Bareilles] for our offering this morning. I’d encourage you while she’s singing it to both listen to the words and think back on some of the conversations that you’ve had in your life.

You can be amazing  
You can turn a phrase into a weapon or a drug  
You can be the outcast  
Or be the backlash of somebody's lack of love  
Or you can start speaking up  
Nothing's gonna hurt you the way that words do  
And they settle 'neath your skin  
Kept on the inside and no sunlight  
Sometimes a shadow wins  
But I wonder what would happen if you

Say what you wanna say  
And let the words fall out  
Honestly I wanna see you be brave

With what you want to say  
And let the words fall out  
Honestly I wanna see you be brave

I just wanna see you  
I just wanna see you  
I just wanna see you  
I wanna see you be brave

I just wanna see you  
I just wanna see you

I just wanna see you  
I wanna see you be brave

Everybody's been there, everybody's been stared down  
By the enemy  
Fallen for the fear and done some disappearing  
Bow down to the mighty  
Don't run, stop holding your tongue  
Maybe there's a way out of the cage where you live  
Maybe one of these days you can let the light in  
Show me how big your brave is

Say what you wanna say  
And let the words fall out  
Honestly I wanna see you be brave

With what you want to say  
And let the words fall out  
Honestly I wanna see you be brave

Innocence, your history of silence  
Won't do you any good  
Did you think it would?  
Let your words be anything but empty  
Why don't you tell them the truth?

Say what you wanna say  
And let the words fall out  
Honestly I wanna see you be brave

With what you want to say  
And let the words fall out  
Honestly I wanna see you be brave

I just wanna see you  
I just wanna see you  
I just wanna see you  
I wanna see you be brave

I just wanna see you  
I just wanna see you  
I just wanna see you  
See you be brave

Thank you so much, Becky. Some great lyrics there. "I want to see you be brave. Let your words be anything but empty. Why don't you tell them the truth?" We are in this series on the prophets and the prophets were truth tellers. Many of them had messages for the whole nation of Israel, but the prophet we are looking at today had a very personal message, one on one, for the King of Israel. I think we can learn a lot from it. It was a crucial conversation. Crucial conversations

are when someone speaks a hard truth to you or you speak a hard truth to someone else, but both situations require humility and courage.

Today we are looking at the crucial conversation between Nathan the prophet and King David after he had had his affair with Bathsheba. Nathan was a prophet during the reigns of both David and King Solomon. He had a huge influence on David's life. He told David not to build the temple that he wanted to build, but instead, to let his son Solomon build it. He also told David that his reign would endure, be established, forever. But lastly, he spoke this truth to David that we are going to talk about today.

You all remember the story of David and Bathsheba, but a little bit of backstory first. David is in a bit of a midlife slump. Things are going well in the kingdom but he's about 50 years old and he's maybe not quite as attractive as he once was. He's sitting at home maybe a little bit bored while his troops are out fighting the Ammonites. He sees Bathsheba bathing on the rooftop and he sends for her. He sleeps with her and gets her pregnant. When he finds out she is pregnant, he brings her husband Uriah home from the front and tries to manipulate the situation to make Uriah believe that he's the father of the baby. When that doesn't work, David uses Joab, his right-hand man, to take Uriah back out into the field and get him killed. When Uriah is killed, David mourns for the required seven days, then he marries Bathsheba and they have a son.

Now at this point, David has broken at least four of the Ten Commandments. Don't covet. Don't murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't lie. He's in kind of a bad place and as my friend Steve Mader pointed out, and I think this is so important, as serious as adultery is, this is a bigger deal because it was a power play. When David called Bathsheba to come to him, do you think she felt like she had any choice in the matter? Could she say *no* to the king, to this person in power? And yet, my impression of David, who broke all these Commandments and did this power play, is that it was just kind of an inconvenient blip on his radar screen. He doesn't name his sin. He is just doing damage control. This is where we pick up our Scripture this morning, after David's affair with Bathsheba. As we read it, I want you to ask yourself, what can you observe about God and maybe what can you observe about yourself? So this is 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 12.

12 The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. <sup>2</sup>The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, <sup>3</sup>but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

<sup>4</sup>"Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

<sup>5</sup>David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! <sup>6</sup>He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

In this parable David is the wealthy man who has taken the lamb, Bathsheba, from the poor man, Uriah. But David doesn't recognize himself at first. Isn't it so much easier to see the sin in someone else's life than to see it in your own? "You're the man," Nathan says. Then David

confessed to Nathan, "I've sinned against God." Nathan pronounced, "Yes, but that's not the last word. God forgives your sin. You won't die for it, but because of your blasphemous behavior, the son born to you will die."

Now, last week when John talked about prophecy, he talked about three different levels. He talked about the actual event that happens, he talked about the written Word about it, and then he talked about what we read years later and the transferable principles for it. I want to say a little more about that because this prophecy is contained in a type of Scripture called narrative. When we read narrative, we need to keep something very important in mind. Narratives are descriptive, not prescriptive. They are stories that describe what happened, but they don't prescribe what necessarily should happen. This is a positive example. It describes something positive we can learn from in a good way, but it is not saying we need to go out and tell everybody what they are doing wrong. It describes something; it doesn't say exactly the way it should be. Just something to keep in mind.

As we look at this passage, there are four things I think we maybe can learn about God and about ourselves. The first thing is this. We are masters at rationalization. We are masters at rationalizing our sin and turning a blind eye to the sin in our lives. There is a verse Jeremiah 17:9 that says,

<sup>9</sup> The heart is deceitful above all things  
and beyond cure.  
Who can understand it?

That can be a really discouraging verse for me. I need help with it. When David first hears this story, he doesn't even recognize himself. We need help. In the last few years, I've taken up two new sports, running and tennis. With both of these sports, they really require somebody outside of yourself to tell you how you're doing and help you get better. I want to share with you a picture of what my running might be like. [Slide shown.] Up at the top is what I feel I look like. Oh, yeah! But at the bottom is what I'm pretty sure I actually look like. Not a pretty thing. It's hard to see ourselves as we are. The same thing with tennis. I'm a beginner. I try hard. I'm trying to get better and I have wonderful coaches. They'll say, "Laura, you may not realize it but the angle of your racquet is a little off." Or "You need to put your weight a little bit more on your back foot." And it's really helpful. They are pointing out things I can't see, so first of all, it's easy to rationalize and turn a blind eye to our sin.

The second thing is that God wants us to recognize what's really going on in our lives. In verse 1 it said God sent Nathan. I believe this was a loving act on the part of a loving God to send Nathan to David. One of the roles of the prophets is to convict people of sin, but today in addition to prophets, we have the Holy Spirit. John 16:8 says,

<sup>8</sup> And when he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.

I believe that God's desire is that we would be really responsive and sensitive to the nudging of the Holy Spirit when we have sin in our lives. That's Plan A. But I think the Holy Spirit can also be like a cell phone that we sometimes put on *silent* or stick in our pocket and forget about. Then sometimes the Holy Spirit uses a prophet in our lives, a person, to get our attention. God longs for us to recognize our sin and come to Him.

Third, in crucial conversations where hard truth is being spoken, sometimes we're Nathan and sometimes we're David. Sometimes we have to speak the hard truth and sometimes we have to hear the hard truth, but in both roles, we need courage and humility. In the role of Nathan, we need the courage to speak up when it would be easier to remain silent, but we also need humility to go with a posture of recognizing our own sin and our own fallibility and the fact that we also have blind spots. David responds really well to Nathan in this situation, but later on in Scripture, there's a situation where David's son Amnon sins and David has a chance to speak truth to his son and he doesn't. He didn't take on the role of a Nathan like he could have and that was so destructive in his family.

I can relate. I had a situation once where I was called on to be a Nathan and I failed terribly. Many years ago I was friends with a woman and a man, each of them married to other people. We were spending time together in ministry and we even traveled together. I began to recognize that this man and this woman apart from their spouses were becoming closer and closer. I noticed an emotional bond developing there and I thought, oh, gosh. I wonder if this is dangerous? I wonder if maybe I should say something to my friend, the woman? Then I rationalized and thought, oh, but maybe I'm crazy. And what if she gets really mad at me? What if she's really offended? So I didn't say anything. Well, a year later it came out that they had had an affair and both marriages were reeling from it. When I heard this, I cried because I felt like there was some responsibility on my part. I had not stepped up and stepped in as lovingly as I could have to be a Nathan in that situation and maybe some of that heartache and sin could have been avoided. But the role of Nathan needs to be accepted very carefully.

I knew this teenage kid once who would walk around, saying, "I *rebuke* you!" That's not exactly what we are talking about here. We need to realize that Nathan had a loving, trusting relationship with David. They had a history. Nathan was not an enemy with an ax to grind with David. I recognize that sometimes we are called on to speak the truth to power when there's not really a relationship there. There's been an injustice done and we need to say something, but I think that God's ideal for us is to step into situations and speak the truth in love when there is already a loving and trusting relationship.

If you feel like maybe you are being called to be a Nathan in someone's life, I'd encourage you to pray about it and to ask yourself two questions. First of all, ask yourself, "What's my motivation for doing this really?" If there is any sense at all of pleasure or self-righteousness, putting someone else down, step away. And the second question I'd encourage you to ask yourself is "What is the very best thing that can come from this conversation? What's the redemptive value that might come from this?"

So that's if we maybe feel called to be a Nathan, but what if we feel we have been called to be the David in this scenario? What if we are on the receiving end of a crucial conversation? Proverbs 15:31 and 32 says,

<sup>31</sup> Whoever heeds life-giving correction  
will be at home among the wise.

<sup>32</sup> Those who disregard discipline despise themselves,  
but the one who heeds correction gains understanding.

Again, we need courage and humility to receive correction. What's your first reaction when someone says something a little bit critical to you? I'm a first-born and so often there's a reaction of fear. Like, oh, my gosh, what did I do wrong? Sometimes there is anger. There is defensiveness maybe. Maybe you can recognize some of these reactions in yourself. I think for all of us when somebody says something that is hard for us, we need to stop and step back and take a breath and pray. We need to ask God to show us what in this is truth. "God, what do You want me to pay attention to here? What is valid here and how should I respond?"

So, we are masters at rationalizing. God desires us to see ourselves as we really are. Sometimes we are a Nathan and sometimes we are a David. But the last thing and I think the most important thing is: Failure is not fatal. God is just and merciful. When David hears Nathan's story before he recognizes himself, he says, "Oh, my gosh, that guy deserves death!" And then Nathan says, "You're the guy I'm talking about." Whoa! When it sinks in, David takes responsibility. He says, "I've sinned against the Lord." Nathan tells David that there will be consequences, but also that he will be forgiven.

This is the Old Testament, but in the New Testament we have another prophet, the perfect prophet, Jesus, God incarnate. Jesus comes and lives and tells and lives the truth and dies for us and lives again so that we can come to Him with whatever and ask forgiveness and be in a forever relationship with Him. We are all Davids, we are all broken, we are all blind, all in need of help. Like David, we need to see the truth and turn to God, and when we do, He is full of mercy and compassion, waiting to forgive us.

The really cool thing is, in addition to this narrative account, we have what happened afterwards. We have David's words to God written in Psalm 51. I've asked some friends to come up and read some stanzas of this. They will read a little bit and leave some spaces of silence. As they do this, I want you to reflect and maybe speak your own words of truth to God in the silence, what you might say to God in confession.

<sup>1</sup> Look on me with a heart of mercy, O God,  
according to Your generous love.  
According to Your great compassion,  
wipe out *every consequence of my shameful crimes*.  
<sup>2</sup> Thoroughly wash me, *inside and out*, of all my crooked deeds.  
Cleanse me from my sins.

[Pause.]

<sup>3</sup> For I am *fully* aware of all I have done wrong,  
and my guilt is there, staring me in the face.  
<sup>4</sup> It was against You, only You, that I sinned,  
for I have done what You say is wrong, right before Your eyes.  
So when You speak, You are in the right.  
When You judge, Your judgments are pure and true.  
<sup>5</sup> For I was guilty from the day I was born,  
a sinner from the time my mother became pregnant with me.

[Pause.]

<sup>6</sup> But still, You long *to enthrone* truth throughout my being;  
in unseen places deep within me, You show me wisdom.

<sup>7</sup> Cleanse me *of my wickedness* with hyssop, and I will be clean.  
*If You wash me, I will be whiter than snow.*

<sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God;  
restore within me a sense of being brand new.

<sup>11</sup> Do not throw me far away from Your presence,  
and do not remove Your Holy Spirit from me.

<sup>12</sup> Give back to me the *deep* delight of being saved by You;  
let Your willing Spirit sustain me.

1<sup>st</sup> John 1:9 says,

<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us  
from all unrighteousness.

Let's pray.

Lord, we come to You as Nathans and Davids, broken and in need of eyes to see and  
ears to hear the truth about ourselves. Help us to speak the truth graciously. Help us to  
hear and acknowledge our sins and turn to You for forgiveness. Thank You that You are  
full of mercy. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution  
is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*