

*confession as confronting false stories*

*Tina Schlabach, 1-28-2018*

*Shalom Mennonite Fellowship*

meditation on ps. 51:12 / tms

*Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

Intro:

“Dwelling in the Word w/ Psalm 51”

Read verse 12 2x again.... invite people to call out a word or phrase that catches your attention especially...

- *people call out* -

The traditional story attached to this psalm - a psalm of confession - is that this is *King David's* prayer of confession.

- in my Bible it says: *Psalm 51 - to the leader: a psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.*

2 Samuel chps. 11 and 12 begins the story this way, foreshadowing what is to come:

*“It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king’s house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful.”*

- King David, using his position of power, forced Bathsheba, married to Uriah  
- one of David’s own military leaders - to come to him and have sex with him.  
- when she discovered her pregnancy, David tried different ways to cover it up, and when nothing worked, as a last resort he gave orders to put Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah, at the forefront of the next battle, and to withdraw from him so that he would be vulnerable to attack by the enemy.

- As planned, Uriah was killed in battle  
- And David then sent for Bathsheba and made her one of his wives.

- Bathsheba's side of the story is silent.
- which reminds us of the "me too!" movement of now, giving voice to Bathsheba and to so many many women like her through the ages.

*I wonder what story David told himself during all of this so that he could justify his actions.*

Maybe it went something like this: consciously or unconsciously... *I am king - and able to ask for what I want....*

- *including women; women are mine to have.*
- *it is very unfortunate that Bathsheba is married to one of my most loyal soldiers, and I tried to fix it, but I couldn't - so getting Uriah killed, sadly, was my only alternative to him coming home to find his wife pregnant.*
- *I had to prevent Uriah and others finding out what I did! My own reputation as king is more important than Uriah's life.*

(pause)

We have trouble seeing ourselves clearly when we are tempted to get something we want, from a position of power! (David)

-The president of our nation, talking candidly about his own behavior with women: quote: **"And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything."**

But, the text in 2 Samuel goes on to say, *"But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, and the Lord sent Nathan to David."*

*And Nathan does something very interesting.*

*Instead of confronting David head on, Nathan tells David a new story:*

**"There were two men in the same city, one rich, one poor. The rich man had a lot of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing—just one small ewe lamb that he had bought. He raised that lamb, and it grew up with him and his**

children. It would eat from his food and drink from his cup—even sleep in his arms! It was like a daughter to him.

“Now a traveler came to visit the rich man, but he wasn’t willing to take anything from his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had arrived. Instead, he took the poor man’s ewe lamb and prepared it for the visitor.” David got very angry at the man, and he said to Nathan, “As surely as the Lord lives, the one who did this is demonic! He must restore the ewe lamb seven times over because he did this and because he had no compassion.” (pause)

“You are that man!” Nathan told David.

*\*\*\* And this new story hits David in the heart - where part of him is still open and willing and able to see himself.*

David prays, writes, sings.... his wrongdoing to God - in the words of psalm 51. That is - according to biblical tradition - the particular story behind this psalm.

Yet this psalm can hold all of our stories of wrongdoing  
of truth-telling  
and of trusting God to restore us  
to help us to restore our relationships  
and, in time, to restore our joy because of God’s healing grace.

And as we move through this worship series where we see and learn about the Doctrine of Discovery -

I wonder too whether our hearts are also changed - like David’s - when we begin to recognize that a powerful story we have been given and taught - or told ourselves - is not right.

- that the story we have lived with neglects to tell the full truth about all the people involved, and that we need to open our minds and hearts to a new more complex, truthful story
- a new story about ourselves and others.
- a new story that asks a response of us.

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the word confess = to acknowledge together

- we speak our sins and our participation in sinful systems to God, and in the community of faith

On Feb. 18th, Ted & Co. will present “A Comic Lament” here - about the Doctrine of Discovery

- I love that it is called “ A Comic Lament.”
- those two words don’t often go together!
- recognizes the *absurdity* of the Doctrine of Discovery - and also the need for *lament* and confession.
- when Nathan the prophet told his story about the rich man stealing the lamb from the poor man - David thought it was absurd! The *absurdity* helped David to make the connection and see himself.

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In the bigger framework of confessing, of acknowledging together what has happened....

- the psalmist asks for joy to be restored.
- the joy that comes from salvation - God’s healing grace.

In the reading that you will hear soon, you will hear Jesus telling three stories of “the lost being found.”

- in the longest of these stories, Jesus tells a story where God is a loving parent, waiting for the youngest son to wake up from a false story that has failed him, and to come home to the true story of his own belovedness.

- Jesus knows God as a Parent concerned for the spirit and wellbeing of all of God's children of the world - those who are so vulnerable, and those who seem to have it all.
- Jesus knows God as a Parent filled with love who wants all the children of the world to be included in God's joyful shalom party - with no one excluded - in the many ways we humans have learned how to exclude.

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(pause)

the flow of joy is restored in us like opening a blocked stream of water -

- through confessing = *acknowledging, together*
- through willing spirits to listen to prophets - like Nathan and like our indigenous sisters and brothers - who challenge our false stories, and help our eyes and hearts open to the stories *they* have lived.
- through trusting more and more deeply in the healing grace of our mothering and fathering God, in whom it is never too late to mend what is broken.