

"The Finger of God"

Text: 2 Samuel 11:26-12:1-9, 13-14

May God the Holy Spirit fill you with the sort of humility and faith that causes you simply to fall at the Savior's feet and cry out, **"God be merciful to me, the sinner."** But may each of you also hear his irrevocable decree: **"I have put away yours sins. You will not die."** Amen.

Fellow Christians:

I am loath in the extreme to even bring up such a thing for fear of degrading the setting, but unfortunately sin needs to be met head-on and unequivocally. So we begin with a question: Which is the "naughty finger?" The answer, of course, is that there isn't one. God made us with no such thing. Yet, as is the case with everything that man touches, we have sullied and perverted God's perfect, holy creation. Man has perverted that which ought to be holy, and wholly dedicated to our God, with ideas and associations that ought to have absolutely no place in the hearts, the minds, and the lives of his people. So also our society has developed a gesture that is meant to crudely convey utter disrespect and loathing. Clearly such sentiments are out of place and inappropriate in our dealings with our fellow human beings. How much more so in connection with our God.

Yet the fact remains that there is no level of sin and perversion to which even Christians are incapable of sinking; no amount of disrespect and rebellion, even toward our Holy God, of which we are not also guilty. The fact is you and I not only heap such disrespect on our neighbors, we also display such appalling sentiments toward our God. One of our problems here is that we most often fail to recognize our thoughts and attitudes as that which they really are. We fool ourselves into believing that we are never guilty of *that* level of rebellion and depravity. We are bad, sure, but not *that* bad – at least not toward our God.

Honesty dictates otherwise. Then we are forced to acknowledge that we are not only *capable* of such things, we are *guilty* of them. We not only "have it in us" to do such things, we have actually *done* them, and, worse still, have adopted a casual attitude toward such sin.

Our text for this morning will make that clear to us – if we are honest, and if we will truly take these words to heart and apply them forthrightly to ourselves. That portion of God's Word according to which we will be

instructed, condemned, and comforted this morning is found in the Book of 2nd Samuel, the 11th Chapter:

^{ESV} **2 Samuel 11:26 - 12:1-9, 13-14** *When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. ²⁷ And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD. And the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. ² The rich man had very many flocks and herds, ³ but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴ Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." ⁵ Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, ⁶ and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." ⁷ ¶ Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. ⁸ And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. ⁹ Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight?..' ¹³ David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die."*

These are God's Words, perfect in every way. May God the Holy Spirit grant you the grace to trust that these are God's Words and to hear and learn from them accordingly. To this end we pray, **"Sanctify us by the Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."** Amen.

Most here this morning are probably familiar with the story of David and Bathsheba. Interestingly enough most of the discussion concerning this sad affair seems to center on the rather pointless discussion of whether or not David had fallen from grace during his adulterous affair with the wife of one of his trusted friends, whom he

then murdered. Was he a believer during this time or wasn't he? This is a fruitless discussion for several reasons. First, because Scripture doesn't tell us one way or the other. Second, because it is a distraction. It diverts our attention from the more important and sure lessons to be learned here. Third, because the idea that David had, for a time, fallen from faith often creates a misapplied and therefore unhealthy terror in Christians that they too fall from faith every time they commit a sin "willfully." "Sinning willfully" usually refers to committing a sin even when you know it is wrong – which for most Christians is the vast majority of sins we commit.

Don't misunderstand. Sin is both profoundly serious and incredibly dangerous. It deteriorates faith, and if allowed to remain will eventually destroy that faith. But the notion that Christians fall from faith every time we know something is sinful and do it anyway is not a Christian concept.

What we can and should learn from our text is, first of all, the true nature of what David had fallen into. His actions, whether he was conscious of it or not, represented a direct affront to, and rebellion against, God. That's what sin is. Sin is a breaking of *God's* laws. David committed adultery, murder, and theft. Adultery is a rejection of the spouse God gave you, and coveting what he has not. Murder is the decision to decide *for God* when someone's time of grace will end. Theft is a demonstration of dissatisfaction *with how God distributed his gifts*, both to you and to others. All sin is like that – a gesture of rebellion and disrespect *toward God*.

Is that really true, that all sin is ultimately directed toward God, or is the concept just man-made? Our text gives us a clear answer, doesn't it? David had sinned against Bathsheba; he had sinned against Uriah; he had offended and therefore sinned against his own people since what David had done was an offense to them. Yet what does David confess to Nathan? **David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."** Recognize then, first of all, that all sin is ultimately directed toward God.

What can we expect from God when we do such things? When we rebel against his Word and will, what should we anticipate that God will do in return? He uses a different finger than we do, doesn't he? Again from our text: **"...And the LORD sent Nathan to David... Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"**

That's what we should expect from our God. The finger that he gives us is the one that he points directly at us in loving accusation. *You* are the man. *You* are the one who has sinned. *You* have shown utter contempt to me and for my will.

If God had no love for David, he would have allowed him to fester and die in his sin. He certainly wouldn't have sent Nathan to confront him. Why would he, if he had no love for him? Sending Nathan was an act of pure compassion from a merciful God. Again, the most common debate here is whether or not David had fallen from faith. Thanks be to God he made that argument doubly irrelevant by calling David to repentance and leaving no doubt as to his state of faith or grace after Nathan's visit.

This is not only meant to be a great comfort for Christians of all ages, it is meant to teach us exactly how we can expect a loving God to treat us until our time of grace is ended. Disturbingly enough the last thing we want to hear when we have fallen into sin is condemnation for that sin. Yet that is exactly the sort of love our God has for us.

Who then is your Nathan? Who is it that God sends to call you to repentance? Sometimes it's a parent; sometimes a friend, your pastor, or your spouse. Sometimes it's not even a who but a what, for sometimes the accusation comes from hearing or reading his Word. But God's accusation will come, in one form or another, for your God has too much love for you to do otherwise.

And that conviction is absolutely essential, isn't it? Even Christians find it disturbingly easy to get comfortable with sin – to justify our inexcusable behavior. We can be really good at coming up with all sorts of excuses as to why what we are doing is somehow acceptable. Do you suppose anything was different with David? Can you imagine the rationalizations King David could have mustered? *"I'm the king; kings are entitled."* *"No one knows the stress I experience on a daily basis."* *"This is trivial compared to what other kings do."*

Obviously great pride is always at work in such cases. Man finds himself in direct conflict with God's Word and will, and yet man finds a way to convince himself that he is entitled or justified in doing the very things that he knows full well his God forbids.

Recognizing this sinful pride in man, God sent Nathan with a most clever and effective plan: he would get David to convict himself, which is exactly what David did. God sent Nathan with a story of an event, an injustice, that was so obviously bad that David didn't hesitate in announcing his sentence: **"As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, ⁶ and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."**

Scripture Readings

Interesting, isn't it, how David was able to live in denial of his own terrible sin, but immediately pronounced a sentence of *death* on the man who stole a lamb. He was able to justify adultery, betrayal, murder, theft, and coveting *in himself*, but sentenced the fictitious lamb thief to death.

You and I need to learn also from this lesson – because you and I have the same tendencies, the same inclination toward a warped sense of justice. Our justice tends to condemn the most minor infractions in others, even while it justifies the most disgusting and despicable sins in ourselves.

Learn then to expect that when you sin, God will point the finger of accusation directly and unwaveringly at you. He loves you too much to allow you to be destroyed by the cancer that is sin.

But that is by no means all that our God gives us – that one finger pointed in accusation at us. He also then points away from us, to his Son. *At* his Son. That's the whole point of the accusation, isn't it? It's never God's plan to drive us to despair but to repentance. His goal is always a strengthening of our faith in him as our Savior-God, as the one who paid for every single one of our sins when his Son gave his perfect life on Calvary. In stark contrast to the evil finger-gestures of our sins, our Savior pleads with us as he did with Thomas in the upper room after his resurrection: ***Then Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."*** John 20:27

That's always what our God wants for us and in us – faith. Denying our sin makes God a liar and makes the sacrifice of Jesus Christ pointless. But hear this well: confessing our sin obligates our God to forgive that sin. 1 John 1:8-9: ***"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."***

God through Nathan restored to David the joy of the salvation that was his. What a tremendous comfort to know that he has the exact same goal in mind for you and me. Despite our rebellion, despite our sin, God cleansed us by placing our entire debt of sin and guilt on his Son. Because of what Jesus did, our God desires life eternal for every single human soul, and has pronounced that the world's sin debt has been paid by his Son as our substitute.

What a joy and comfort to know that we have such a God – a God who showers us with such complete and perfect love, in all its various forms, even when we have treated him so shamefully. Amen.

^{ESV} **Galatians 2:15-21** We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶ yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. ¹⁷ But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! ¹⁸ For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. ¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

^{ESV} **Luke 7:36-50** One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷ And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." ⁴⁰ And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." ⁴¹ "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." ⁴⁴ Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven--for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." ⁴⁸ And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

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The Third Sunday after Pentecost – June 12, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 437 (Verses 1-2) (Red Hymnal)

"Who Trusts in God, a Strong Abode"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Galatians 2:15-21) It is a testament to sinful man's stubbornness that anyone at all can read the Bible and come away believing that it teaches anything but salvation not by works but as a gift of God's undeserved love – his grace. The Galatians were uncompromisingly condemned by Paul for even adding one work that man must do to the good that Jesus has done. Our first reading gives the conclusion to the matter: "***If righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.***"

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 51 (Page 28)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 7:36-50) When sinful, prideful man sees examples of abject humility and repentance, they view such things as pathetic and undignified. God sees things much differently. We witness this very thing in our first lesson, where a woman, filled with remorse, washes Jesus' feet with her tears and dries them with her hair. Even here, note that it was the woman's faith that saved her, not her humble act of love.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 778 (Brown Hymnal)

"Grace Has a Thrilling Sound"

The Sermon – Text: 2 Samuel 11:26-12:1-9, 13-14 (Back page of this bulletin)

"The Finger of God"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn -331 (Verse 1-3, 5, 7) (Red Hymnal)

"Yea, as I Live, Jehovah Saith"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -437 (Verse 3) (Red Hymnal)

"Who Trusts in God, a Strong Abode"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (32) Average (46)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and Coffee time
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Rick Grams (Prince of Peace – Hecla) has announced his retirement from the pastoral ministry, effective June 30. Pastor George Dummann is considering the call to Rock of Ages of Grand Rapids. Pastor Nathanael Mayhew is considering the call to Faith Lutheran of Markesan, WI. Pastor Matthew Ude is considering the call to Ascension Lutheran of Batavia (Chicago area).

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet this morning after the fellowship time.

Vacation Bible School – We are currently in the process of organizing this year's Vacation Bible School. Please consult the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table and contact VBS Coordinator Sandy Roehl if you have any questions.

CLC Convention Summary – Please take the time to read through the Convention Summary insert prepared by Secretary Eichstadt and address any questions or concerns to the Pastor or Delegate McEnroe.