

Abnormally Attracted To Sin?

A sermon preached by The Reverend Michael J. Connelly
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When my son Mikey was a teenager, one of his favorite TV programs was the *Jerry Springer Show*. Jerry Springer's talk show was a daily parade of troubled, twisted, losing and lost humanity caught up in almost every conceivable form of turmoil, brokenness, scandal, and shame. The sixty-six year-old grandfather who divorced his wife to marry the twenty-year-old babysitter. The young mother who discovered she could sell more than Tupperware on Craigslist. The bride who left her new husband a week after the wedding to run away with the maid of honor. You get the picture. As the show ended every afternoon, my son would invariably yell at the screen, "Jerry, where do you find these people?"

Today's Old Testament reading from the Book of Samuel, the story of David and Bathsheba, is a steamy tale of lust, betrayal, greed, and murder worthy of any episode of the Jerry Springer Show. And like my son, we could rightly shout out the same question to God. "God, where do you find these people?" Where did you find somebody like Uriah the Hittite, who would rather spend the afternoon in a foxhole with his army buddies than in the arms of his beautiful wife Bathsheba. It doesn't matter that David, his King, was virtually ordering him to go home to be with his wife. "No, no, I want to go back out there to the battle with my comrades," Uriah says. Hmm.

And God, where did you ever find this King David? One minute he is slaying giants in your name and singing psalms to your glory that we still pray today; and the next minute he is not much more than a peeping tom who immediately falls in lust with the bathing beauty next door. And even though David already had at least ten other wives and who knows how many more concubines, in his greed he has to add one more pretty face to his collection, even if she is already someone else's wife.

And worse, far worse, is what David does after he learns that Bathsheba is pregnant. His cowardly plan at first was to cover up his sin by having Uriah spend the night with Bathsheba so that everyone would think Uriah was the baby's father. When that plan fails, David turns to simple murder. David sends Uriah back to the battle carrying his own death warrant. The message to Joab the commander in the field: "Abandon this guy out in the front lines, so that he might be struck down and killed." A conveniently dead husband, a lovely widow, and King David is free to make Bathsheba his own.

And what about Bathsheba? Of all the places to take a bath! Didn't she know David could see her? Was she lonely, perhaps? She certainly wasn't getting much attention from her warrior husband. Was she as eager to become David's woman as he was to make her his? Scripture says that when David sent his messengers to get her, "She came to him." It doesn't seem that she put up too much of a fight, does it? And she is so utterly practical in her message to David: "I am pregnant. Now what are you going to do about it?" I wonder sometimes, did Bathsheba plan the whole thing?

So God, where do you find all these people? And more importantly, why? Why does God seem to search under all the darkest rocks of humanity to find the weakest and snakiest and shabbiest of us to help bring about his divine will? Aren't characters in the Bible all supposed to be upright and righteous role models for us?

I think Saint Paul is trying to give at least a partial answer to that question in his Letter to the Church at Ephesus. Paul writes, "I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit." In other words, we human beings

so easily forget who we really are: in our innermost being, we are truly sparks of God's own divinity. So quickly, though, we fall victim to our ego, our illusions and delusions, our weaknesses and our sins. We forget that we are honored daughters and sons in the house of the living God. Still, no matter how far we have strayed, God's Spirit calls to us again and again to remind us of who we truly are. No matter how low we have fallen, God's power and grace and love continue to work within us to bring forth miracles.

Further on in his letter, Paul reminds us: "You are being rooted and grounded in love, ... the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Simone Weil, the French philosopher, mystic, and political activist once wrote: "Every sin is an attempt to fly from emptiness." We all have committed sins to fill up some need, or some lack, or some emptiness in our lives. Think about it. But God knows all the lonely and empty places in our lives. God knew all the sins that each one of us would ever commit before God even brought us into being. And none of it stopped him. God longs to fill our emptiness with the fullness of his love and grace, if we only let him. Yes, God punished the sin of David and Bathsheba; the baby born from their illicit union dies. Yet in the end, there is redemption and forgiveness. David and Bathsheba marry, and their love is lasting and true. Bathsheba is blessed with another child; this is Solomon, who would become the wisest ruler of Israel, and from whose line, Jesus of Nazareth himself would someday be born, as Matthew Chapter 1, verse 6 tells us. If our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ can rightly be called the Son of David, we must also admit that Jesus is just as much the son of Bathsheba the bathing beauty. In God's world, sin never has the last word. Evil will never be the final reality.

Meditate on what Paul writes: "God's power at work within us is able to accomplish infinitely more than we can ask or imagine." God's love, God's grace, God's blessings are able to accomplish anything. Human weakness is never an obstacle to God. Our sins can never derail God's ultimate intention to save each and every one of us. God always looks beyond our weaknesses, our obsessions, our failures, and he works his will regardless of it all. No sin is ever stronger than the hard wood of Christ's cross.

The popular singer, songwriter, and pianist Tori Amos recently produced a new CD of her music titled, "Abnormally Attracted To Sin." In the title song of the CD, she sings these lyrics:

*Impeccable peccadillo,
I know who you are.
Tales of longing sway,
Lost without a verse.
Hymns of swing lay low
there by the church:
"Don't go in if you are
abnormally attracted to sin."*

Now Tori Amos is not only a rock star but the daughter of a Methodist minister and she probably knows a whole lot more about sin than all of us. But I think she is dead wrong in that line: "Don't go in to the church, if you are abnormally attracted to sin." I would venture to guess that most of us here are guilty of one sort of sin or another. I know I am. But here we all are, sinners in church. It has often been said that hospitals are for the sick, not for healthy. And in the same way, Christ came not to congratulate the virtuous and self-righteous but to save sinners. Sorry Tori, churches should have a banner outside that proclaims, "Come on in if you are abnormally attracted to sin!"

No matter what is going on in our lives, we should never let our guilt interfere with God's grace. Church is where we can come to realign our lives with God's love. Church is where we can come to reconnect ourselves to the divine energy that is the Source and Ground of our very being. Church is where we can come to remember and retell our family story as children of God and to be fed at our Father's table. Long ago, Jesus fed five thousand hungry followers in a field. In the very same way

today, he fills us with his living Word and feeds us with his bread and wine of his presence, so that he may dwell in us and we in him.

Yes, God's power at work within us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. God's power can bring forth a feast for thousands from a few barley loaves and fish. God's power can bring forth from the ancient scandalous love affair of David and Bathsheba the very Savior of the world. God's power can bring forth miracles in the sorriest, most sin-soaked lives. Martin Luther once wrote:

*This life is therefore not righteousness,
but growth in righteousness;
not health but healing;
not being but becoming.
The process is not yet finished,
but it is going on.
This is not the end, but it is the road.
All does not yet gleam in glory,
but all is being polished.*

And to that good news for all of us, let us say Amen.