

That Moment of Hell

Epistle Ephesians 4:1-16

Gospel John 6:24-35

Psalm 51:1-12

The Lesson:

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13 (Text courtesy Vanderbilt Divinity Library)

11:26 When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him.

11:27 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,

12:1 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.

12:2 The rich man had very many flocks and herds;

12:3 but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him.

12:4 Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him."

12:5 Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die;

12:6 he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

12:7 Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul;

12:8 I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more.

12:9 Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

12:10 Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.

12:11 Thus says the LORD: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun.

12:12 For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun."

12:13a David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

"I have sinned against the Lord."

Only true sociopaths would *not* know that moment of pure dread. Some may not say 'I have sinned against the Lord' - they may say, 'I really messed up,' or 'I can't believe I said that,' or 'Man, I am so sorry I did that,' but we all know that moment of pure hell, when we see that we did something terribly wrong. I'm not talking about bumping into someone accidentally at Wal-Mart, or burping in public. No, really messing up, either by accident or acting practically unconscious of the deed, and abruptly realizing that what we did was bad.

Suddenly the room around us changes, we get a little confused and light headed, maybe even get scared or angry, feel like we are helpless and lost, like little children. And we can lose confidence in ourselves - how could we have *not* known before or while we did this that it was wrong?

It happens. We have these 'black holes' in our conscious selves at times, when we somehow aren't connected all the time with all various levels of human relating, and we mess up. That moment of 'Hell on Earth' - and we can't always correct them. Some things we do, we can't take back and sometimes, we can't make good.

David certainly couldn't. He didn't even seem to realize that he did something wrong until Nathan told him. Of course, we know he realized it on some level, because he was trying desperately to cover up his actions. He had first tried to get the husband of his adulterous lover to break a vow of continence

in order to cover up his guilt, and then David simply had Uriah killed to cover up his guilt. So, I guess he figured, as long as no one talks to him about it, he doesn't have to face his guilt on a conscious level. Many knew, but who would have the nerve to call him on it?

Well, that *is* the job of the court Prophet, and that is what Nathan did. It seems to be the job of the holy ones to remind people that it is God that sets the moral standards, not human beings. David had been made aware of this in this reading of our scriptures today. And we all may have had a moment or two in our lives when we recognized a weakness in our standards. Hopefully, not to the extreme of David's, but we are talking principles here.

So I guess the easiest way to avoid those moments of Hell, is to spend as much time as possible trying to determine what would be the ideals that God would want us to emulate and make them a part of our living. It seems all too easy to get distracted and forget God for a while. We start winding our way down our own life / path choices and before we know it, we realize we forgot all about our spiritual nature and how it is intricately connected to the nature and the humans around us.

Christian Unity isn't just a modern terminology relating to the ecumenical movement to unify the various denominations. No, even Paul was talking about it. Unity is individually taking the responsibility for our actions that may separate us from God's will and each other. Paul writes to the Ephesians about this. He wrote that Christ descended into Hell - he could not have ascended, if he hadn't descended, and because of this, Jesus knew the pain of the low human moral standards. Jesus witnessed the pain in his travels and felt for those people who suffered as a result of those moments of Hell, either as the giver or the receiver of the anguish. He spent his earthly ministry trying to help those who suffered; through his teachings, healings, miracles and forgiveness of sins. He, himself, truly *suffered* at the hands of those who were misguided about their behaviors. He descended into the lower parts of the human existence, and rose above all the sorrow.

How on earth did he do this? Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in a Nazi prison that I once visited in Berlin, "God lets himself be pushed out of the world onto the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us." It is in our weakness that we can fully be open to and be thankful for a God who allows himself to suffer with us. It is in those moments of Hell when we realize we are desperately in need of Grace that we can be fully aware of where we really are in the universe. It is in our tears that we can taste and see that the Lord is good. We are particularly vulnerable in our moments of awareness of the pain that all humans share, and when we can hear the words of our Lord on the cross, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," then we can be closer to that miracle of Grace.

John Mogabgab wrote, "Tears of grief and tears of joy often mingle together in a single moment of enhanced vision, endowing us with new eyes that discern traces of God who suffers with us silently in the pure vulnerability and power of divine love. There is comfort in such tears. They bring fresh understanding that God is nearby, sharing to the full our humanity in all its bitterness and blessedness."

So, when we realize that we have sinned, and we recognize and allow ourselves to feel the pain of our guilt and shame, there we can especially feel the hope of our Lord God, because Jesus was there too, he was in that moment of hell. And he so desperately wants us to know that there is hope even when you are in hell. God loves us so much that even when we are in the depths of our lowest humanity possible - there he is to be with us, to love us and striving to help us out of the hole. There is no place we can go on heaven or earth where God is not, and there is nothing anyone can do that God does not want to heal them from.

God sets the moral standards, not humans, but God will go anywhere to help us rise up and live up to those standards. Everyone can begin anywhere to listen to God, to be guided by love back into the unity of the human condition. It is God we need to be focusing on for our moral strength, not the media, our neighbors, not even our families. And we must each strive to contact God in our own lives for that grace and guidance that we need to avoid the moments of hell.

When the people followed Jesus in our Gospel reading, one gets the impression at first that they were a bunch of cats - feed them once and they'll follow you everywhere. They had been following him because he fed them bread, and there was a comparison made to the Manna which came from heaven in the wilderness while Moses had led the Israelites out of captivity. But those following Jesus seemed to have forgotten that Moses didn't produce the Manna - God did. And the point that Jesus wanted to make was that God and for those who could read between the lines, Jesus, is the supplier of the physical and spiritual nourishment that they craved, as do we.

We can do that when we, as Paul requested, "strive to lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have all been called . . . making every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."

So may we all rejoice with tears of joy that there is no place we can go where God is not, even into the depths of our own hell. We are called to be one with each other in love and experience the amazing grace of our lord Jesus Christ. So let's sing it, why don't we? Amazing Grace . . .