**Sixth Sunday after Epiphany – The Savior’s Sermon: “Live a holy life!”**

**Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY February 16, 2014**

**Based on selected verses from 2 Samuel 11 & 12 written by Vicar Ben Zuberbier**

**“The LORD has taken away your sin!”**

*1 In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. 2 One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, 3 and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" 4 Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then [1] she went back home. 5 The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant." 6 So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David. 7 When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. 8 Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. 9 But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house. 10 When David was told, "Uriah did not go home," he asked him, "Haven't you just come from a distance? Why didn't you go home?" 11 Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" 12 Then David said to him, "Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. 13 At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home. 14 In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. 15 In it he wrote, "Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die." 16 So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. 17 When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died.* *26 When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. 27 After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the LORD. 12:1 The LORD sent Nathan to David. 7 Nathan said to David, 9 “Why did you sin against the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.” 13 Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Nathan replied, “The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.”*

Maybe you’ve seen those commercials by Direct TV that urge you to get rid of cable. They outline a very unfortunate, you might even say, “ridiculous” chain of events. Here’s one example, “When you pay too much for cable you feel down. When you feel down you stay in bed. When you stay in bed they give your job to someone new. When they give your job to someone new he has a lot to learn. When he has a lot to learn mistakes are made. And when mistakes are made you get body slammed by a Lowland Gorilla. Don’t Get Body Slammed by a Lowland Gorilla. Get rid of Cable and upgrade to DIRECT TV.” I think most of us would agree that just because we have cable, the odds of a chain of events being set off ending with us getting body slammed by a large primate are rather slim.

But in the story about King David that we will reflect on this morning, there was one decision that set off a very real and tragic chain of events with eternal consequences. It all began with his decision to stay home from battle. The story begins in verse 1, **“In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. . . But [he] remained in Jerusalem” (11:1)**.While the men were out in battle, David decided to stay back home in the palace. To enjoy some down time.

One day, as evening settled upon the city of Jerusalem, David went up to the palace roof to breathe in some of the cool brisk evening air. As the sun set and the remaining rays of daylight danced across the rooftops. Something caught his eye. There was a very beautiful woman bathing.

More than just simply curious, he sent for someone to tell him more about this beautiful woman who lived near the palace. A man in the palace knew and told him exactly who she was. In fact, it seemed he was even aware of what David was planning to do, and subtly warned him, **“Isn’t this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” (11:3)**. Bathsheba was taken. She was a married woman. But her husband was away at war, and David had already given into his lust. He sent messengers to get her. And when she arrived at the palace, he slept with her. Then he sent her away. He had given into temptation and sinned. In his sinful pride, he didn’t think much of it. He thought this would go unnoticed. It wouldn’t be a public scandal or make national news.

But one day he got an unexpected message. Bathsheba **sent word to him saying, “I am pregnant” (11:5)**. As the messenger spoke these words, fear heightened as he remembered the words of God’s written law, **“If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife. . . both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death” (Leviticus 20:10)**. If this news went public, it wasn’t just his kingship that would be taken away—it would be his life and that of Bathsheba.

To avoid this, he listened to the advice the sinful voice inside of him was dishing and put together a plan to cover this up. He sent word to Joab, his general in the field, **“Send me Uriah the Hittite” (11:6)**. Uriah came back from the combat zone and entered Jerusalem. At David’s invite, he went to the king’s palace and reported to him how the war was going. After Uriah’s report, David sent him home to his wife Bathsheba hoping he would sleep with her so after he’d go back to war and come home once again, a child wouldn’t be a rude surprise.

But Uriah refused to go home to his wife Bathsheba. He **“slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master’s servants and did not go down to his house” (11:9)**. So the next day David asked him, **“Haven’t you just come from a distance? Why didn’t you go home?” (11:10)**. Uriah told him, **“My master Joab and my lord’s men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!” (11:11)**. There was no way Uriah was going to indulge in the pleasures of being home when his brothers were in the combat zone.

David saw this soldier’s unwavering devotion to duty and put together another plan. He told Uriah he could stay another day and invited him over for dinner again. He got him drunk and sent him home hoping that would “do the trick”. But the next morning, David heard the same story. Again Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with the servants.

Unsuccessful after two attempts, his sinful pride prodded him on to drastic measures. He wrote a letter to the general and sent it along with Uriah to deliver. When Joab opened the letter he read, **“Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die” (11:15)**. So when Joab launched an attack against the enemy city, **“he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were” (11:16).**

At the expense of the lives of some other Israelite soldiers, David got his wish. Uriah fell in battle. Bathsheba received the crushing news and mourned. After a week or so, **“David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son” (11:27)**. To his sinful pride the chain of events that ensued was rather favorable. The fear of losing his kingship was taken away. The death penalty was taken away. But there was one thing that wasn’t taken away. It was hidden before man—not known. But the LORD knew. He had witnessed this whole chain of events and saw it much differently. The LORD had seen him sleep with another man’s wife. He had seen all the steps of his deception. He had seen David do nothing less than murder Uriah. **“The thing David had done displeased the LORD” (11:27)**. And the guilt of his sin remained—a disgusting sight to the LORD. A massive burden that he left on his shoulders, all because he covered up his sin instead of repenting and asking forgiveness. And now before the LORD, the penalty was still intact as well—eternal condemnation.

Like David, maybe there are some sins you’re sinful pride has attempted to cover up. Maybe it’s convinced you that because no one around you can read your mind and hear the thoughts of lust you tend to have, that they’re hidden to LORD as well. Maybe it’s convinced you there’s no forgiveness for a sexual sin you’ve committed so you placed a blanket of shame over it instead of confessing it to the LORD and asking for forgiveness. Maybe you’ve secretly kept feelings of dislike or spite toward someone in your heart because they’ll never find out, and forgotten the LORD knows the motives of the heart. Maybe you’ve gone so far as to wish someone would get in a nasty car accident so they won’t be a part of your life anymore, while ignoring the fact that your dark secret isn’t so secret to the LORD. You see, the LORD sees all these sins that we attempt to cover up.

The LORD in his grace doesn’t leave it at sin and punishment. That chain of events in this story about David didn’t stop where I stopped. There was one more breathtaking event at the end of this chain of events linked together by sin. The LORD sent his prophet Nathan to him who gave him a clear reminder of what exactly it was he had done. **“Nathan said to David. . . ‘Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword” (12:7,9)**. It was all before him. It was out in the open. The full extent of his sin exposed. Everything revealed. If this was to become public he’d face the death penalty as well as Bathsheba. And with trembling lips he said, **“I have sinned against the LORD” (12:13).** And here was the gracious event that marked the end of this chain of events linked together by sin. **“The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die” (12:13).** All his sin gone! His punishment gone! He knew the LORD had taken away his sin and punishment and right where he was going to put it, on the Messiah who was promised to come through his line. On Jesus!

And the LORD takes away your sins and mine and places them on Jesus too. For every time you’ve had a dirty thought of lust about someone else, Jesus never did. For every time you got enticed into some shameful sexual sin, Jesus never gave into temptation. For every time you’ve harbored anger and spite toward someone, or even wished tragedy would strike their life, Jesus did just the opposite. He showed love even to the men who were nailing him to the cross. **“Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34),** he said. You see the LORD took away your sins and gave them to someone who’s lived the perfect life you have not and cannot and I have not and cannot.

The LORD didn’t take *some* of your sins away from you, he took *all* of them—every single one. The LORD caught all the dirty thoughts lingering around in your mind and passed them along to Jesus. With the strength of his hands the LORD lifted the sins that you’ve felt are unforgivable off your chest and took them away to Jesus for him to feel the weight of. He reached into your heart and grabbed your anger and spite and dislike toward others and made Jesus claim them. The LORD picked out your thoughts about another’s life being harmed, and placed them on Jesus. The LORD has taken away *all* your sins—every single one—and piled them on Jesus.

He took all these sins and piled them on Jesus so he would receive the punishment we deserve for them. He took the penalty of death in our place. He did it willingly at an execution site called Golgotha. As his body hung on the cross, the sin of all mankind through all ages hung there with him. And when he died, all your sin—every single dirty, hateful, and shameful one—died forever too. The result? The punishment is gone. Vanished. Now before the LORD our judge you are blameless.

With your sin taken away from you, you are given back nothing but priceless treasures in its place. Because the LORD has taken away your sin, he’s given you back a clean and clear conscience, free of guilt, and a refreshed attitude toward life. Because the LORD has taken away your sin, he’s given you a pure heart a heart that’s glad to show love and kindness to others. Because the LORD has taken away the punishment for your sin and made Jesus claim it, you’re given a claim to a place in heaven with the LORD. All because he has taken away your sin!

A special right that the LORD has given to each and every believer is the right to forgive sins. Jesus said, **“If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven” (John 20:23)**. And this isn’t just one sided. He’s given his believers the opportunity to confess their sins to other believers.

If your conscience is burdened about feelings of hate you’ve had toward someone, the LORD gives you the invitation to approach that person you wronged and ask for forgiveness and they’re given the authority to say, “The LORD has taken away your sin.” If there’s a sin you haven’t necessarily committed against someone else but it’s a massive weight on your chest, he invites you to go to someone you trust and know well and get it off your chest—to approach your parents or a close friend. The LORD invites you to take that step and they’re given the authority to say, “The LORD has taken away your sin.” And if it’s a matter you feel is best taken before Pastor, don’t hesitate! The door to his office is always open and his phone is always on. It’s truly a blessing that the LORD has given to his believers in Jesus, to confess our sins to others and to hear from their mouth, “The LORD has taken away your sin.”

The LORD also invites you to do this with many people at one time—at church. One of the most precious gems of the rich liturgy we use in church is what comes near the beginning. Think back to what we did back near the beginning of the service. These are some of the words we spoke together, “My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. . . I confess my iniquity. I am troubled by my sin.” After a hymn stanza, silent confession—a time to show our sins to the LORD personally—and a little more singing by the band, we heard that wonderful pronouncement of Absolution from Pastor’s lips. . . “It is by grace you have been saved. In Jesus you have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.” We call this part of the service Confession and Absolution. Although the wording of it is different nearly every time we come together for church, the message is that same beautiful message the prophet Nathan spoke to David—“The LORD has taken away your sin.”

That seven word phrase is packed with meaning and comfort. Brothers and sisters, hold on to it. Cling to it. Rejoice in it. “The LORD has taken away your sin.” Amen.