

LENT DEVOTIONAL MARCH 22, 2017

Dr. Helen Blier, Director of Continuing Education, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

PSALM 51

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- 4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.
- 5 Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.
- 6 You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
- 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
- 9 Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
- 11 Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.
- 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
- 14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

- 15 O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- 16 For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
- 17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
- 18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
- 19 then you will delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

DEVOTIONAL

David's remorse provides us with a heavy read three weeks into Lent. After being confronted by Nathan, David pleads for God's mercy. His sin? It was more than just adultery and murder. Rather, those acts, horrible in themselves, were the means by which he violated right relationship—with Bathsheba, with Uriah, with himself, and, ultimately, with God. Psalm 51 is his response to Nathan's shattering revelation—"You are the man!" (2 Sam 12:7).

Self-disclosure is no stranger to us these days. #Nofilter, social media, calling-out culture, TSA scrutiny, medical tests—all plumb the depths of human bodies and behavior and dredge stuff up into the light of day for scrutiny, consumption, and judgment. But David's remorse is different. It's not self-disclosure—it's self-examination within the context of a relationship with a God who judges . . . and whose primary attribute is mercy. As Pope Francis has said, "The mercy of our God is infinite and indescribable." Indeed, the plumb line for God's judgment of us is the degree to which we—created in God's image and likeness—show mercy ourselves.

As we engage in our own self-examination this Lenten season, let's remember that we do so in the embrace of a God of mercy who calls us to extend the same to others (and ourselves, too).

PRAYER

God of mercy, we are not so different from David. We too go astray and find ourselves forgetting that you call us to be people of that same mercy—showing welcome to the stranger, compassion to the oppressed, forgiveness to others as imperfect as we are. Awaken in us the kind of self-awareness that brings us deeper into the experience of your infinite and indescribable love so that we can incarnate that love to those who need it most.

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