

**Catholic Church of the Beatitudes  
Santa Barbara, CA**

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B) – June 16, 2013

**Gary Becker**

Reflections on **2 Samuel 12:7-10,13; Galatians 2:16, 19-21; Luke 7:36-8:3**

**T**oday's readings are strong, dramatic and important. These scriptures render for us a very clear picture of what is expected of us if we are truly Christian.

In the first reading, from Second Samuel, Chapter 12, we are confronted by an amazing reversal. A few pages before, in Chapter 7, God gives the prophet Nathan a quite different message to deliver to David. He says to Nathan that David should be told that he should build a temple, and that he will rule over all the tribes of Israel, and David will have a great name like the great ones of this earth. God says he will be a *father* to David and David's throne will be established forever.

So David, the charismatic soldier king who is beloved by the people and leads them in singing and worship, is chosen by God and his future seems secure.

But then we come to Chapter 12 and suddenly everything changes. In an incredible development, King David, the man who literally has everything, is committing adultery and murder. He desired the wife of one of his generals, Uriah the Hittite, so he took the wife named Bathsheba into his palace and sent Uriah into the front lines of a battle where everyone was being killed. As the scripture has it, God said that David murdered Uriah with the sword of the Ammonites and David showed contempt for God by taking Bathsheba for his own.

This is an almost unbelievable change from Chapter 7. This was the very leader beloved by God, called to unite the twelve tribes and given the means to lead his people

to peace and prosperity forever. And then in a short time this leader becomes corrupt and commits adultery and murder. How much more terrible could a sin be?

So, as this story was read to you a few minutes ago, or whenever you first heard it, what did you think God would do to David, in light of his terrible crimes?

Weren't you surprised when David asked for forgiveness and God immediately granted it? Does this seem to be justice? An honorable soldier is murdered, and his wife taken against her will, and the result is God forgives David without *any* conventional punishment?

I submit to you that this is not a story about criminal law and appropriate sanctions for crimes. This is a story about the incredible mercy of our God. I could not imagine how David could have committed a greater crime under the circumstances, and yet when David asks for forgiveness, it is promptly granted. So—this is a story about God's mercy and *not* about crime and punishment.

The Hebrew authors who wrote down this scripture wanted to give us some way to begin to understand how much our God loves us and the unbelievable extent of God's mercy.

I am not suggesting that some one can casually commit murder and adultery without consequences. In this instance, I believe God extended her mercy because David stood before Nathan with head bowed and with every feature indicating the depth of his sorrow and sadness. I think the authors are

saying they want us to know that God's mercy is far beyond our human capacity to understand.

I believe God is telling us that we should never give up and conclude that we are worthless and cannot be forgiven for our sins. If we are truly sorry for our actions, then God forgives.

I am going to move on now to the second reading because I believe it further informs the first reading. In this letter of Paul to the Galatians, we have another puzzling saying. Paul says that we are not justified by following the law, but by loving and believing in Jesus. He goes further and says that no one will be justified by only keeping the law.

This seems to be a very radical statement but, when you think about it, it's really evident that we cannot assert at the end of our lives that we have kept the law, so therefore we should have our heavenly reward.

God calls for much more than obeying the speed limit. God expects us to pull off on the shoulder and help our neighbor out of the ditch. God calls us to obey the law of love – even to the point of loving our enemies. And when Paul says, “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me,” he means that he has embraced the law of love, and that he has been made new by that love.

Remember that what Paul encountered on the road to Damascus was the end of that life for him. So through *that law* he died to the law, and now he has entered into union with Christ's death in a way that he can make the remarkable statement that he no longer lives, but Christ lives in him. Paul is describing entering a new sphere of reality where he is no longer in charge and is submitting himself totally to wherever Christ's law of love will lead him.

The Gospel today brings another dramatic confrontation. This story takes place early

in Jesus ministry, while he was still in Galilee. The woman was known to be a sinner, but no more is said; in that culture it could have meant she was a midwife who came in contact with blood, someone who associated with gentiles, or a person who was disabled. Any of those conditions would have labeled her a sinner.

In any event, this story is really focused on Simon and not on the woman. Simon invited Jesus to dinner, but did not treat him like an honored guest should have been treated in those days. Jesus noticed this treatment and offered a parable in response, about two people who have been forgiven debts—one small and the other much larger. When he asked Simon who was the most grateful, Simon replied the one who was forgiven the most.

Jesus' response to Simon “Do you see this woman?” brings us to the crux of Luke's story. It is an invitation for Simon, and us, to move beyond our usual judgments, and to see as God sees.

Jesus notes that those who are forgiven much are filled with gratitude and love greatly. Those who consider themselves righteous assume they have little need of forgiveness, and they are less loving. Jesus' point to all of us, especially those who consider themselves righteous, is that we need to see our fellow human beings as God would see them, and forgive them as God forgives us.

Simon was a righteous man who lived by the commandments, but his story also indicates that living by the law is not enough. God is love. So, of course, God's law is the *law of love* – and the lessons in these passages is that we must treat our fellow humans with all the love and compassion that God has for us. God forgives and forgives and forgives – and we must do likewise.