

You are that man

2 Samuel 12:1-7

June 12, 2016

What makes you angry?

When you can't get service on your cell phone? When Fareway is all out of your favorite brand of chips? When the San Jose Sharks and captain and hometown hero, Joe Pavelski, lose?

Do you get angry when you lose the vote? When you lose the argument? When the decision -- your family's decision, your church's decision, your country's decision -- goes against what you want?

Do you get angry when someone defies you? Badmouths you? Talks about you behind your back?

I'll tell you what makes me angry! Every day I come to work. I come into Waterloo eastbound on Highway 218 and exit onto Washington Street, where I immediately must cross three lanes of traffic to get into the right hand lane to turn right onto West Park. More than once, more than twice, even more than three times -- I don't remember how many times -- a car has come from behind me on the exit ramp and passed me on the right, even though my right hand turn signal is on, effectively cutting me off. That makes me mad! And I lay on the horn and let him have it!

I have long believed that anger is a window into the soul. Anger breaks through the decorous facade we like to project and reveals the passions that lie at the heart of who we really are. What makes us angry says a lot about the content of our character.

So what about the content of my character? Apparently I don't like to be passed and I don't like to lose. I don't like anybody to get the better of me or disregard me or take advantage of me. It makes me cross to be crossed.

What about the content of David's character? Because David was angry. David was very angry. The prophet Nathan told him a story ...

There were two men, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had many cattle and many sheep, while the poor man had one lamb, one lamb he bought and brought into his household, feeding it and caring for it and loving it like it was one of his own children.

One day the rich man welcomed a visitor into his home. He didn't want to kill one of the many sheep he had to fix a meal for his guest. Instead, he took the poor man's lamb and killed it and cooked it to serve for his house guest.

Shame! Shame! Shame! David was angry. David was indignant. At the injustice, the injury, the affront done to this poor man and his poor lamb.

David was not angered by anything done to himself or denied himself, but by something done to hurt another. David's anger reveals the depth of his character -- his passion for justice, his defense of the "little ones," his love of God's justice and his defense of God's equal regard for all God's people, for all God's creatures, great and small.

I swear by the living Lord that man ought to die for doing such a cruel thing. That man should pay back four times as much as he took.

And Nathan said to David: "You are that man."

You are that man. Oh, the weight of those words! Oh, the terrible, crushing weight of that realization. It's me!

It was David. David was the rich man, the man with everything, the man blessed -- and he was blessed, by God -- with wealth and power and prestige. And Uriah? A simple soldier, simply a faithful servant, a servant to his king and to his country, a simple man with a wife. And David took her. Because he wanted to. Because he could. David, you are that man.

So was David not the man he seemed to be? It's not that simple. It is never that simple. David's anger reveals the man he truly is -- a man of justice and fairness, a man of God, a man who loves God and who seeks to do God's will, a man after God's own heart, a good man. But he was also that man ... a sinner.

It was David. And it is me. I am that man. And it is you.

We get angry, justifiably so, because we are good people: angry at injustice, angry at unfairness, angry at the mistreatment of refugees, at the exploitation of children, at the pitiless plight of the poor, angry at pride and selfishness and disregard and disdain, angry at people who don't care, angry at people who may care but don't do anything about it. But it's us!

We are sinners! I have sinned, you have sinned, both by what we have done and by what we have left undone. And call it what it is. It is sin, not an error in judgment, not an unfortunate mistake, not a moment of weakness, but sin. We defy God by doing what we want to do, by doing what we can do, in spite of what God wants, in spite of what we know God wants, just like David.

Nathan told David: "You are that man."

David said: "I have sinned against the Lord."

And here is the quintessence of David's character, of David's faith. He was no less a sinner, but he knew it and he acknowledged it and he humbled himself before the Lord and before the Lord's servant.

And Nathan said: "The Lord forgives you."

The Lord forgives you! Because this is what God wants, because this is who God is. God forgives. God restores. God reconciles. God heals. Not because sin doesn't matter, but the exact opposite -- because sin does matter, because sin destroys human beings and God loves human beings.

When we talk about sin and about forgiveness, we are not oversimplifying human behavior and its consequences, but acknowledging its complexity. Forgiveness does not remove the sin and its effects, forgiveness reconciles the sinner. Forgiveness does not mean it's OK, because it's not OK. There is a cost. And the tragedy, the soul-stabbing tragedy, of sin is this, that it is often others who must bear the cost of my sin. It is often others who must bear the cost of my sin. David's sin had consequences, a terrible cost, for David himself, but also and especially for Uriah, for Bathsheba, and for the child that was conceived in her after David took her, and for the children and the children's children yet to be born.

Forgiveness is not about going back, because you can't go back, you can't undo. Forgiveness is about going forward, because God wants to go forward ... with you.

This is the complexity and this is the glory of God's grace. God's grace allots you freedom: freedom to choose, freedom to do, real freedom and real power to affect the course of you own life and of others' lives. And God's grace is there when what you choose, when what you do, hurts yourself and hurts others. God's grace is there when you sin ... to pick you up, to dust you off, to let you see yourself as you really are, to see all the ugliness that is a part of you and to see all the enduring beauty that is a part of you. God's grace is there to pick you up and point you once more in the right direction, in the direction that leads to life, for you and for everybody else with whom you share this world.

You are that man. Be honest! It is you! And your honesty, your humility, your confession, is the first step toward healing, the first step toward God, the first step ahead into the life God desires for you.

Acknowledge who and what you are. You are that man! You are that woman! You are a worm! And you are a wondrous and beautiful child of God. Which means you can be what God intends you to be, but not on your own, not by your own power.

Be humble enough to confess what you are and be humble enough to be forgiven. It takes a person with real character to say: "I have sinned against the Lord." And it takes a person of real character to go on, to go forward, with a joy and a lightness of step that comes not from knowing that you have done right by God, but that God has done right by you, that God wants you to live and live well, that God loves you, and that God's love and God's grace will never let you ignore your sin ... or be defeated by it.