

Sinners Can Repent and Eat the Bread of Life

Jesus said, “Do not work for the food that perishes...”

When I was in the 6th grade, I was a Girl Scout. I was very proud to be a Girl Scout. I made (or thought I made) a friend in my troop; I’ll call her Janie. Wearing our uniforms, Janie and I walked to the local market, called Leo and Mella’s, after a meeting one afternoon. She led me to a back aisle where the bulk candy was and pulled out a bag of already opened candy from behind the bags on the shelf. She said, “open your hand”, so I opened it. She poured some candy into my hand and then some into hers. Just then Leo came toward the aisle saying, “what are you girls doing?” Janie said, “hurry, put it in your mouth,” so I did. I don’t know what she did with the bag. All I remember is that we mumbled, “nothing” with the candy in our mouths, scurried from the aisle and ran out the door. I vowed never to go into that store again—and never to steal again.

Many months passed and finally I thought for sure the incident had been forgotten. Oh but no it had not! When I went to the cash register to pay, Leo said, “you know what you girls did don’t you?” I acknowledged that I did. “I’m going to call your mother,” he said. I don’t really remember leaving the store, but I do remember running home; running faster than I ever had before—or since—trying to beat that phone call. When I got through the door my mother was standing there. She said, “Leo just called.” To this day I don’t know how he got our number but sobbing big sobs, I told her what had happened. She was so mad she marched me to Janie’s house several blocks away, knocked on the door and Janie’s mom answered and my mom told her what had happened. Well, Janie’s mom had gotten a somewhat different story. It was my word against Janie’s; and her mother believed her--that it was **my** doing. I think my mother wanted to believe me but believe or not I needed to be punished for my part in it.

I was devastated in oh, so many ways. I was a good girl. I was a Christian girl. I was a Girl Scout. Argh! Why had I allowed my desire to have Janie for my friend—and have the candy—cause me to be a thief.

It seems that King David and I had something in common. We were looking for “bread” in all the wrong places. We ignored our inner voice, our God voice, so that we could satisfy a momentary desire of the flesh. Though at first we tried to hide it, we knew not only that we had gone against our own moral compass, we had disappointed God.

Now you can say that David's sin was way bigger—he was an adult, a King, after all; and it was adultery! But the damage to our relationship with God, self, and others is what suffered. The sin does not have to be gigantic to have a life-long effect—some of which can be called collateral damage. The punishment (the consequence) both David and I received affected others as well as ourselves.

David's actions cost the life of Uriah, the relationship with his children—including the death of Bathsheba's first-born son, and it tarnished Bathsheba's virtue and that of his other wives.

My collateral damage was the cancellation of a trip on a glass bottom boat to Catalina Island. And this caused my brothers and sister and our grandmother to miss out on a lifetime opportunity. None of us ever made it to Catalina. While that may seem small in comparison it looms large in my life.

Neither David or I can go back and undue. The consequences happened. But we had a choice. We could be angry, blameful, make excuses, and wallow in the sorrow we brought on ourselves, or we could acknowledge what we did, accept the consequences, turn to God, and ask forgiveness and mercy, and ask God's help in living a more godly life. Psalm 51 is David's soulful attempt at just that.

The United States of America under the banner of Christianity has committed a multitude of sins both overt and covert which can be classified using the metaphor Jesus used: "working for the food that perishes". Over the past 10 weeks our visiting pastor, Karen, has talked about some of the sins that have been committed such as: the "pursuit and consumption of the bread" of consumerism, racism, homophobia, territorialism, colonization, oppression, and domination.

The collateral damage is seen in the effects of global warming/climate change, devastating earthquakes, constant war between nations, homeless/parentless children, substandard living conditions, rampant diseases...and the list goes on and on; you can fill in the blanks!

So, what do we, Christian citizens of the United States, need to do?

When King David is informed that all his prayers to God to spare Bathsheba's son are denied, he chooses to get up, accept that consequence, and carry on as the king God had meant him to be—he did not blame God; he fell down and worshipped God.

He writes in verses 8 and 11 of our Psalm today: *"Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure; wash me, and I shall be clean indeed...Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."*

There is no time like the present to do as King David did in repenting and turning to God. Do we acknowledge our own guilt in these sins—even if only complicit? Surely Joab was complicit when he obeyed David’s order to make sure Uriah was in the line of fire. Do we acknowledge that the consequences include unintended collateral damage? Do we turn to God and ask: *“Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure; wash me, and I shall be clean indeed... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”*

Episcopal Christians, our mandate is clear in the covenant we make at our baptism.

“...when we fall into sin we repent and turn to the Lord...”

And then we are

“...to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourself... and to strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being.”

Repentance is the action to the feeling of remorse. It is the turning away from and going a different direction. For Christians, it is turning to the way of Christ. When we repent it means we need to act.

In our reading from Ephesians there is a list of “gifts”. I think, one way Christians today can turn to the way of Christ is to use our own gifts. We have lawyers, doctors, nurses, accountants, carpenters... you name it, Christians have it.

I believe Jesus would ask us to use those gifts to help bring about reconciliation from the afore mentioned sins of this country. We have the true Bread of life—the Word and life of Jesus to guide us in using our gifts toward the healing and equity of our world and for the world to come.

May our hearts be found contrite, may we repent and return to the Lord, may God renew a right spirit within us, and may we be fed always with the true Bread that gives eternal life—our Lord Jesus Christ.