

Ash Wednesday
March 5, 2025
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Recognizing Against Whom We Sin

Psalm 51:3-4 (EHV)

For I admit my rebellious acts. My sin is always in front of me.

⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned, and I have done this evil in your eyes.

So you are justified when you sentence me. You are blameless when you judge.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Bathsheba, Uriah, and Joab. The palace servants, the soldiers defending Israel, the entire people of Israel. His seven other wives (which is a whole other matter), his children by these other wives, his first son with Bathsheba. These are some of the people against whom David, King of Israel, sinned.

David sinned against all the people of Israel by seeking his own pleasure rather than protecting and caring for the people God anointed him to shepherd. Instead of tending to government matters and leading his army for the benefit of the people, he took the wife of one of his best soldiers. Of course, this was a terrible sin against Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba and faithful soldier of Israel. David betrayed one of the men who was risking his life to protect his king and his people. And then David had Uriah killed. In this he not only sinned against Uriah but also against Joab, the commander of the army. David gave Joab an immoral order to abandon Uriah on the front lines so the enemy would easily overcome him.

And David especially sinned against Bathsheba. He saw her bathing and did not look away. He asked about her. He sent messengers to bring her to the palace. Think also of what a sin it was against the messengers. They are being asked to help David commit adultery and keep it a secret. David had all the power over them and over Bathsheba. He was the king. What choice did she have? He was the commander in chief over her husband. What might happen to her or to her husband if she tried to resist David's advances? Oh, David sinned against many people in this story. His sins caused terrible suffering for many and led others into sin as well. But most of all, David sinned against God.

We hear David's confession to God in verses 3-4 of Psalm 51:

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For many months, David would not admit his rebellious acts. He tried to cover up his sins, hide his sins, and pretend like he was still the God-fearing, faithful shepherd boy the Lord had anointed to be king. But now he admits his rebellious acts. Now he sees his sin clearly and it is always in front of him. Notice that David does not minimize his sins and rebellious acts by calling them mistakes. He does not offer any excuses by saying that he wasn't thinking clearly that day. He does not try to shift even a small part of the blame to anyone else by saying Bathsheba should have known he would be looking from my rooftop at that time of day or that his servants should have given him better advice that day.

As we live among other sinful human beings, it becomes easy for us to overlook our rebellious acts and ignore our own sin. I wouldn't have gotten angry and said those things if that person hadn't cut me off in traffic, said something hurtful, failed to do what they promised to do. I didn't seek out that picture of a woman lacking clothing but there it was on my screen and that's why my eyes lingered on it for a while. I wouldn't have to disobey my parents if they would just

let me do what I want. They are so unreasonable. My friends were talking about things they should not, watching things they should not, and doing things they should not. It was peer pressure. I got caught up in the moment. It wasn't completely my fault.

But it is. David's confession needs to be ours as well.

For I admit my rebellious acts. My sin is always in front of me.

It is always a good time to confess our sins and rebellious acts. The time of Lent is an especially good time. We can be so busy in life that we cover up our sins with work and hobbies and activities for the kids. We dull our minds with endless scrolling on the phones. We can keep our sins from being in front of us by looking at the sins of celebrity singers, actors, politicians, and reality television stars. On these Wednesday evenings we get to put down the phones, turn off the news, pause social media scrolling, and sit before our God with our sins and rebellious acts. There is no one else to blame, no distraction to keep our sins out of our minds. David confesses:

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Yes, David sinned against many people, but God gave the law and only God will sentence and judge according to the law God gave. We sin against family, friends, parents, teachers, neighbors, coworkers and more. But none of them gave the law of God. None of them will be sitting on the throne of judgment on the last day to sentence and judge us. God is the law giver and judge. Every sin is against him and against him only.

We can minimize our sins if we are only dealing with other sinful humans. We can mitigate our responsibility with many excuses. We can ignore our sins against others because they have no power over us. But David teaches us what he learned when he did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Our sins are against the Lord. Our rebellious acts and sinful ways lay bare before him. No explanations from us will minimize the evil we have done before the Lord. He sees all and knows all and every sin we have done against others has been done against him. So we confess tonight and every day:

Against you, you only, have I sinned, and I have done this evil in your eyes.

The Lord is always correct when he judges. He is always right when he proclaims a sentence upon the sinner. David's life would be different because of David's rebellious acts and sins. God told him through the prophet Nathan that because he had Uriah killed with the sword of the enemy, the "sword will not depart from your house forever" (2 Samuel 12:10). David's own children will rebel against him and even take the throne for a time. Because David took another man's wife, others would take his wives. And the child born to Bathsheba and David would die.

David could have complained about such severe consequences for his sin. He could have told God that he was not being fair. He could have been angry at God for the sentence God passed upon him. Instead, David continues with his confession:

So you are justified when you sentence me. You are blameless when you judge.

Our sins and rebellious acts may have lasting consequences in our lives too. Unlike David, we are not told specifically what these might be. But our attitude of confessing our sins against the Lord only includes confessing that I deserve whatever consequences may result from my sin. Confessing like David does means that I am not bitter against the Lord for things that happen in my life. Whatever God decides is good and right and just.

In this season of Lent and especially during these Wednesday evening services, we see that God is just. The Passion History readings show us the Son of God who is just and blameless in his judgments taking the place of sinners under the justice of God. Jesus, in whom there is no sin, took our sins upon himself. Jesus, who had no need to confess even one sin, was treated as our

sins deserve. The just punishment for our sins was upon Christ to give us peace with God. The wounds we deserved from God were inflicted on Christ to heal us of sin. God the Father sentenced his one and only Son to suffering and death to satisfy his justice. The Father judged his Son as guilty for the sins of the world so that he could proclaim the world not guilty of sin.

That is his declaration to you. Through Christ, you are not guilty of sin. Through Christ, your sin has been removed. Through Christ, you are forgiven. Just as there is only one whom we have sinned against, there is only one who has accomplished our salvation. True confession and faith always go together. Only when we trust that Christ has carried our sins to the cross and done away with them, can we truly confess the depravity and evil of our sins without excuse. Believe that the Lord is always correct in his sentence upon those who sin and trust that Jesus suffered the full sentence in your place.

We ask the Lord to lead us to confess like David, with the confidence that the Lord forgives all sin through Christ.

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Amen.