

When Your World Falls Apart

2 Samuel 18:31-33
Ephesians 4:25-5:2

August 12, 2018
Faith Community

Years before the events described in today's Old Testament reading, the prophet Nathan confronted David about his sin with Bathsheba. David, for his part, owned his misdeeds, and Nathan extended God's forgiveness. We looked at that over the past couple weeks. But forgiveness and accountability are not the same. David was indeed forgiven and even went on to be known as a man after God's own heart. But Bathsheba's spouse was still dead, as would be the child to be born of David's infidelity.

Nathan added one more thing that must've sent a shudder down David's spine. He put it this way:

Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house. (2 Samuel 12:10, NRSV)

David would feel that sword in ways he couldn't possibly have imagined at the time, and it began with a case of sexual assault that was not addressed in a healthy way. No one talked about. And since no one talked about it, it was followed by seemingly endless hurtful assumptions and unspoken turmoil that also no one talked about. And since no one talked about any of that as well, the anguish culminated in tragedy that would rock the entire country.

You could see it right away when Absalom, one of David's sons, spoke to Tamar, the victim:

Be quiet for now, my sister; He is your brother; do not take this to heart. (2 Samuel 13:20)

What do you suppose comments like that do to a person who's been so terribly violated? Be quiet. Don't take this to heart. Maybe you know all too well.

Apparently he didn't take his own advice because he allowed his own anger to fester for two years after the attack, after which he saw to it that the perpetrator, a member of his own family, was murdered.

Throughout this drama, it appears that no one directly addressed the growing rage in the royal family, and horrific prices were paid by all. Eleven years, this smoldered and gradually grew.

All that culminated just before today's reading, Absalom had engineered an armed revolt against his father, King David. There was all out war with David's forces winning the victory, but at the cost of his son.

And Nathan's prophecy was fulfilled yet again:

Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house.

And so to today's passage, in which David's brokenness is on full display.

What do you do when you're surrounded by craziness like that that's only made infinitely worse by ignoring, pretending, acting out, or in some other way not dealing with a horrible reality in a healthy manner?

Some things don't change. Like David and his family, many of us don't know how to deal with anger in a healthy way. Instead, we just stuff it, not realizing the price we pay as it builds and builds, like a tea kettle on the stove with the little hole plugged up.

Then again, some of us say things like, 'I don't get mad. I just get even.' What we're really saying is that we allow the trajectory of our lives to be taken over until we do something equally destructive and nothing is resolved.

We don't know how to deal with anger in a healthy way.

Years ago I heard a wise person say something that's stayed with me ever since. He said this:

"Anger floats on a sea of fear."

- Politicians get elected by capitalizing on that.
- Dictators build empires.
- Some businesses make millions because of it.
- Gun sales go through the roof.
- Families can be paralyzed and even destroyed.

"Anger floats on a sea of fear."

Job, another Old Testament figure, had it made. He was healthy, wealthy, well respected in the community, had a wonderful family, and was an all-around neat guy. Dark times came upon him, however, and he lost everything. He

ended up broke, desolate, and disease ridden, a living train wreck. If you were to look for a one-word description of misery, Job would be it.

In the midst of all that heartache and unfairness, even when his friends came up with typical sentiments and sayings that did nothing to help, he nevertheless staked his claim when he said this,

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth. (Job 19:25)

You can bet he didn't feel positive at all, but he affirmed it anyway. He built his life on it.

He addressed his current reality by building on the deepest reality of them all.

When something like this happens to you, let that be your first response. Job number one, instead of burying reality, acknowledge the deepest reality of them all.

Maya Angelou recalls the struggles of her grandmother living through the great depression. Clasp her hands behind her back her grandmother would look up into the distant sky and say, 'I will step out on the word of God.' It was a hard time for everyone, but 'especially so for a single black woman in the South tending her crippled son and two grandchildren. But when faced with mountainous burdens she would face the sky and say, 'I will step out on the word of God.'

"She would look up as if she could will herself into the heavens. And because of her, Maya Angelou grew up knowing that the word of God had power."¹

You address your current reality by building on the deepest reality of them all.

Then comes life for the long haul.

You may remember from the past couple weeks, you can choose your actions, but you cannot choose the consequences.

¹ Maya Angelou, Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now (New York: Random House, 1993), pp. 73-4 as cited in *Dynamic Preaching*, Vol. IX, No. 8, August, 1994.

There's a corollary to that and it's this: what happens to you is not as important as how you respond to what happens to you.

Consider these two bits of wisdom from the apostle Paul:

Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger. (Ephesians 4:26)

It's a direct challenge to those of who don't know how to deal with anger in a healthy way.

Imagine the relationships, even the marriages that could've been saved had people taken this to heart. Think of the lives lost, health complications, career and business failures, even wars themselves that can be traced to this issue.