

Two Sermons on Psalm 51 (Sermon Two)

Kenneth Korby

Psalm 51:1–12

The Text: Psalm 51:5–6

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The text for the homily this morning is verses five and six of Psalm 51.

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

“Behold”: Two Verses Set Before Our Eyes

My dearly beloved brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ, twice that word “Behold” sets these two verses before our eyes to be amazed. We are to be astonished, almost aghast at the disparity between them. “Behold”—look at something about me—and “behold”—look what God’s delight is.

And it is about this that I desire to preach to you this morning on truth in the inward being, God making us wise in the hidden part of our heart, and may it please God that we hear, indeed like the Blessed Virgin, so that Christ grows in us, indeed like Martha and Mary, that we may listen and that we may not complain about those who do listen as we go about our work, and especially those of you who are pastors, I invite you to contemplate this both for yourself and for the work that you do in shepherding those people whom God has given to you. It is not difficult in literature or by registering our human emotion for us to know that we who are so smart and so great as human beings can ask God many hard questions. Who are you? Do you really exist? Why did you do that? Why do you treat me this way?

And I have some respect for good hard questions about God, at least those that come out of some kind of pain and some kind of honesty.

When God Becomes the Questioner

But what I want to call to your attention today is the other side. I want to call to your attention today what happens when God becomes the questioner and we become the answer givers. And I'm going to concentrate on two simple little episodes to illustrate this.

And what we're going after is to see how slippery the human heart is and what it does when it is called to the stand to confess.

Adam and Eve: The Divided Heart

It was Adam and Eve in the garden who had the generosity and the goodness of God, whom they reflected and mirrored in their own sexuality, in their own speech, and in the dominion which they exercised in the world.

It was they who were approached with a lie, and the lie had some effect because of a craving in the heart, a desire, a desire that began to bend the good that they saw against the good of the one who gave it. They not only looked at the fruit, but they desired it to be eaten. A lust is turned loose, a lust which is nurtured by the fact that maybe God is not quite as good as He said, or is not as generous as His creation would signal. Maybe He is a little stingy. Maybe He does have a private area that some good things are not for us.

Lust is where the heart begins its duplicity. It splits, and the heart goes in many ways. Lust is a heart divided, and our hearts have become idol factories. They keep making gods after gods after gods, day and night, almost with every beat of our heart, and we can never love or trust one of them. Not even a false one will we lust with all our heart, because lust has split our heart.

From there, it is not far to sin. It becomes easy to trust the lie: "You shall not die, but you shall be like God."

I want you to notice that the sinner's heart also lives on a word, on a lie. It keeps talking and preaching, it keeps listening and doing: "But you will not die; you will become like God." And you will notice now—you will notice, I hope, with the "behold" and with the sorrow, that we always become like the gods we worship, and so we become like the lies we trust.

I don't mean only the little words that come out. I mean the heart that is split. It becomes like the god it worships, and it—

“Adam, Where Are You?”

It was then that the living God came with His question. I personally rejoice that it was not the question “Adam, who are you? Have you lost your identity?” But it was “Adam, where are you? How do you stand with me and with your wife, with the earth and with the fruit? How do you stand? Where are you?”

It corresponds to the lostness of man, to that work that our Lord did when He came to ferret out the lost. The hard question is “Adam, where are you?” That’s asked by God, and now all Adam has to do is give an answer.

But there we see the slippery heart, the darkened understanding, the folly of the sinner. He immediately grabs for his nearest savior. It is his wife—“she did”—and she immediately grabs for her nearest savior. It’s the serpent, and both of them suggesting that God Himself is responsible: “the one You gave,” “the one You put in the garden.” This is the lie that when we are called to make confession, we find ways to evade.

And you will notice what our lust and sin does. It always teaches us to take something that belongs to God, a good thing, and in our [unclear] to turn it against the good. Evil never makes up anything; it always perverts what is. This is the deceit that is in us inwardly:

“Shapen in Iniquity”

“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Now, don’t turn that into a frivolous little thing saying that copulation is evil and that conception is bad. That is only a perverted understanding of that text. That text is describing that you cannot blame your mother for what you are, or your father, or your teachers, or your pastor, or your congregation. If you want to talk about the sin, then you follow God’s hard question.

Cain: “Where Is Your Brother?”

Now I turn to another little episode, because as we expound this psalm this week, I’m going to be talking always about pastoral work, pastoral care, and the life of the priestly people in the congregation, and so I want to go to another hard question. There were two brothers. I think that they were at worship when this episode developed.

That is, they were offering their sacrifices. It so happens that brothers can fight very well, and brothers at worship can fight best of all. And in the process of their anger, while they were at

worship, Cain rose up and slew his brother Abel.

That's what you do when you are called to the hard spot about your sin: kill the preacher, kill the one who speaks. But then God is the one who raises the question: "Where is your brother, Cain? Where is he?"

It seems to me, my beloved, that the spirit of Cain has become the spirit of the church. We are all interested in our own identity, and we are all interested in doing what we want. And so, I think the hard question of God to Cain is the question to us: "Where is your brother?"

Because we take God's creation, our body and our mind, our desires, and those magnificent impulses, both of feeling and of sentiment, and we imagine that we ourselves are the God who can do with them as we will. But God is hiding there. You touch the fruit, you touch God's gift. You touch the tree, you touch God's work; you touch your neighbor, and you touch somebody whom God has said, "I've always wanted one of you, and now I've made one." When you touch the other one, you touch the clothing of God, and God says then to you, "Now stand up here and tell me, where is your brother?"

Warm Fuzzies and Brutal Honesty

In an age now in which we have come to love to touch each other, we stroke each other with warm fuzzies. We even have developed pastoral practices. Even orthodox seminaries developed pastoral training programs, where what we do is get together and become brutally honest with each other, and with all of our warm fuzzy strokes, we learn how to transact so that I'm okay and you're okay and we're okay.

But I tell you, we ought to be skeptical of that, because whenever a deceitful heart, a lying heart, says, "I am going to be brutally honest with you," he has come to the ultimate deception. He has used a show of truth to hide his trickery.

For we do not come to the truth just because we would like to be true. Truth in the inward being is a craving and a longing that we still remember. For God will not let go of His creation, but we do not achieve truth in the inward being just by deciding we're going to be brutally honest or stroke somebody else while we're being brutally honest. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity."

That split, slippery heart, at the point where will and intention lie behind desire, at the point where desire energizes action—that is where the deceit lies, and in strong juxtaposition to

this, we have the other.

“Thou Desirest Truth in the Inward Parts”

“Behold, behold, You desire.” The Greek—the Septuagint—says, “You love it.” It is [unclear]. He has pleasure in it, like the holy angels kicking up their heels and dancing for joy when only one sinner repents.

God loves the truth. God delights in the truth. “You delight in truth in the inward being.”

How is it then that we who are liars, especially when we are talking about telling the truth, how is it that we shall become true in the inward being?

Confession: A Liar Telling the Truth

I focus first on the word confession. We are confessors. When you make confession of sin, you say what you hear in the ear, and what has struck in the heart. To confess oneself then to be a sinner before God is for a liar to tell the truth. A liar always tells the truth when he says, “I am a liar.” A sinner who confesses to be a sinner confesses, “God, I despise You. I do not trust You. I think You are my enemy. I do not love You with my whole heart.”

That’s why most of us don’t want to be sinners. We want to use confession of sin as a charade to cover over our own deceit, but when the sinner confesses that he is a sinner—that is, when the word of the judgment that he has heard in the ear, that bites in the heart, comes out of the mouth—and he says, “I am a sinner,” then he speaks the truth, and when he speaks the truth, he and God have joined hands. For he who wants to be a sinner wants to hold on to his sin and let go of God. He who confesses his sin wants to let go of his sin and hold on to God.

The first step in becoming true in the inward being is the confession that we are not true in the inward being. To be a sinner then is to say to God, “I am the liar; You are the right one. I am wrong. You are the one who is right. You are the one who seeks me. I am the one who seeks to evade.”

To be a sinner is therefore to go under the judgment, to go under the death, because it is to address the God who must put sinners to death. “You delight in truth in the inward being,” because the God who is the God of mercy is the one who comes to save sinners. If you will not have God for your judge, you cannot have Him for your merciful Father, for He is the one who, in His Son, gave that man to be for sinners.

The God Who Comes to Sinners with Mercy

Where, therefore, there is the confession of the sin in this truth in the inward being, there is where the God is who rescues sinners. For Jesus did not wait for people to extricate themselves from their sin and then come and buddy up to them. He comes to find them in their sin and death. He who calls himself the truth, the way, and the life. Truth in the inward being then has this second movement: that where we are sinners and confessed sinners, we stand in the presence of the God of truth, who comes to sinners with mercy.

What does He do with them? He touches them. He heals them, He eats with them, and today even He still invites us to sit at table with Him, where He is food, cook, baker, waiter, pleader, and He Himself becomes the victim of the sin, like you are the victim of—of your own sin, of the sins of your fathers and mothers and children and all around you; He becomes the victim, Paschal victim offered for us.

And when you go into the death of sin under the judgment as a sinner, that's where He meets you, because He died the death on the cross for us and for our salvation. This, my dearly beloved brothers and sisters of Christ, is the wisdom of God.

The Wisdom of God

God is the one who made Jesus to be for us wisdom and righteousness and holiness and redemption, so that we might glory and boast in God. Wisdom in the inward being is what He gives you when He teaches you how He works.

Learn from the Song of Hannah. Learn from the Magnificat. Learn from our crucified Lord. When He saves you, He condemns you. When He gives you life, He slays you. When he shows you his glory, he allows you to be in great suffering.

And when the great men and women of faith pray, they most often hear what Jesus heard: "No, go through the suffering," so that the will of the penitent is welded to the will of the merciful God. That's how He truths us in our inward being.

Truthing One Another in Love

Two things in closing. I commend to you for your meditation and reflection, as you have time this day or other days, the fourth chapter of Ephesians, particularly describing how He has built together in one holy church this company of people, and where He says then how we are

to truth one another in love. He has a Greek participle there. It's an activity of truthing. By speaking this word, we are to truth one another in love. And the pattern of that truth is the pattern of righteousness and holiness.

This is the way God is making right what is wrong, and there follows that marvelous saying: strip away the evil, kill it off, strip it off the way you peel a banana, the way you get—I guess if you want to say it-skinned alive. That's what repentance is like, and put on that new man, so that that truthing is an activity by His Word that we ourselves engage in as we live with and speak to each other that truth.

Emeth: Amen

The second thing: I have come to love the complexity of "He loves truth in the inward being." Emeth is the Hebrew word, related to Amen, amen. That is, the confessor in his heart and from his mouth says what he has heard in his ear. God makes a judgment, and he says amen. God makes an absolution, and he says Amen. God delights in the Amen in your heart.

That is the wisdom, the wisdom of how He works to true you, which He will create in you. But I shan't go farther because tomorrow, this evening, we're going to talk about how we hear joy and gladness when we hear holy absolution. So much for this morning.

The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you today and forever. You better say your amen louder.

SOURCE

Kenneth F. Korby · Morning homily, Psalm 51:5–6 ("Thou desirest truth in the inward parts") · date not given

Transcribed from an audio recording of a sermon by Kenneth F. Korby (CTSFWMedia). [unclear] marks words that could not be made out.