

February 11, 2018 – Soli Deo Gloria
By Wayne J. Schneider

“The First Look is Free.”

Psalm 51:1-17

Sitting in Theology class one day in seminary, a fellow student asked professor Smedes, “When does looking at a woman become adultery?” The teacher paused and then responded, “The first look is free.” What he was saying is it is biological to be attracted to beauty, but when you begin planning ways to take advantage of the woman or the man, you have already started to sin.

One of the wonders of the Holy Scriptures is its honesty, its frankness. The story of Bathsheba and King David poignantly illustrates this truth.

The king of Israel disobeys many of God’s commands in his choice to commit adultery with Bathsheba. Following the tryst, to screen the affair, he plots to have Bathsheba’s husband Uriah, murdered in a scene Tom Clancy could easily write. David’s arrogance is displayed in how he pretends to be Bathsheba’s guardian. Can you envision King David’s subjects talking about how righteous their king is, taking a widow into his harem!

The Bible exhorts us not to live by a double standard. Secrets poison the mind; pollute the soul; and destroy the spirit. Grace is given when we are HONEST with God. But, human nature duplicitous: we would rather take a swim in the river denial, hiding the truth, than either being caught or admitting our failure. None wish to experience the pain of our actions or misdeeds, so we lie, we deny, we pretend, we keep secrets.

I read somewhere that *“God loves you just the way you are, but God loves you too much to leave you that way.”* This “David and Bathsheba” drama ends, when the prophet Nathan chooses an audience to expose the king to. Through a story, the prophet exposes David’s treachery. The king is filled with ‘righteous indignation,’ only to hear the prophet say, *“David, you are that man.”*

When you are trapped in your secrets, what do you do? The strength of the twelve-step programs is found in their first step: *“we admitted we were powerless over (then you name the issue) that our lives had become unmanageable.”* The birth of healing in our souls, our spirits, and our relationships, is found in admitting the truth. Long ago, Christians gave us the gift of Ash Wednesday, the symbolic, visual reminder that we are vulnerable humans, always standing in need of repentance.

Repentance or remorse, is accepting the truth of who we are and then asking for God’s grace to start the renovation. This is what David does in this Psalm of repentance.

“For you have no delight in sacrifice;^{LEP} if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.”

“The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;^{LEP} a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. “

Most of us expend vast amounts of energy pretending that everything is just Jim-dandy. Like classic Greek actors, we hold up masks hiding our real selves, hoping others will not discover the secrets we hide: a wounded marriage; strained relationships with our children; addictive behaviors; or the sins of a negative spirit, gossip, or being judgmental. The might of the Season of Lent is the opportunity to be truthful. St. James asks us, *“Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.”* (James 5:16)

In order to fracture our cycle of self-dependency and genuinely encounter grace, we must walk away from the lies we keep telling ourselves. Ash Wednesday, next Wednesday, the beginning of the Season of Lent, calls us to our need of confession for our brokenness. King David understood this before Nathan the prophet called him to accountability. Right away he knew that God was not interested in ritual sacrifices; God wanted honesty. Does this prayer ring true for you?

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, ^L~~SEP~~ and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.”

John Wesley understood the power of bringing our lives into the light of day, and for that reason insisted that Methodists honestly share their sins. Times may have changed, but confession is still good for the soul. Alleluia. Amen.