

## Devotional

given by Euline Brock at a Presbyterian [women's] meeting at First Presbyterian Church in Wichita Falls, TX

some time in the spring of 1964

*[This followed a dialogue--prepared by the national church--given by a white woman and a black woman. That dialogue was read at the second meeting of the Denton Interracial Women's Fellowship, with the two parts read very effectively by Ann Barnett and Betty Kimble.]*

If we have heard the voice of those offended by injustice and are motivated to seek reconciliation through the power of God, we must learn that neither the offense or nor the reconciliation is a matter of concern to someone else "out there," but is of concern to us, here and now.

Reconciliation can have its beginning only when we recognize our offense, our separation from God and from each other. Too often in our true thoughts we are more inclined to congratulate God on His good fortune in having people like us on His side than we are to cry out, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Too often when the subject of racial injustice is brought up, we deplore conditions in some other city or some other state while we insist that there are no racial problems in our town—perhaps because minority groups in our town have been so oppressed that they lack the spirit and will to protest. Or, when confronted by aggressive, militant demands for equal opportunity for all Americans, we evade the real issue of OUR responsibility and OUR guilt by loudly objecting to the methods used by those trying to gain Constitutional rights. So, before we seek "the power to become reconciled" by God's grace, we must first look at ourselves to find the source of our alienation.

A fresh look at the familiar story in II Samuel at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter possibly can illuminate our problem for us:

(1) And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. (2) The rich man had very many flocks and herds; (3) but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his morsel, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. (4) Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared for the man who had come to him." (5) Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; (6) and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

(7) Nathan said to David, "You are the man."

This story of great offense related by Nathan easily aroused David's indignation. Too often, however, when we are presented with such an indictment, augmented by clear evidence, we are slow to perceive any offense at all. Indeed, our blindness and our fears may even lead us

to be offended by the very cries of pain of the offended ones, and we turn our hearts away to channel our so-called Christian mission toward matters more acceptable to our sensibilities.

But if we, like David, are able to perceive the offense, we have made the first step toward reconciliation,—but only the first step.

The next step is to discover who the offender is—and it is not “that man” about whom David waxed indignant. “YOU are the man,” Nathan dared to say. Our guest today and others of those offended will not tell us this much. But our own conscience may be God’s spokesman, may stir us enough that we can see ourselves as the offender, may make us realize that our silence and our inaction are contributing to injustice just as surely as the hate-filled rantings and maneuverings of the overt racist.

II Samuel points out that offense to a fellow man is sin against God and so often comes from those whom God has richly favored—with possessions, position, education, unlimited opportunities. From 12:7b-9: “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul, and I gave you your master’s house, and your master’s wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the Ammonites.” Our search for reconciliation, then, does not consist only of making amends to our brothers, but must begin with confession to God, admitting that we personally are guilty of offense against our neighbor and therefore against Him. The power of reconciliation is not ours, but God’s.

David insisted that the man who had “done this deserves to die.” His offense can never be undone. He has a penalty to pay: Nathan announces that penalty in verses 10-12 and v. 14:

(10) ‘Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ (11) Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. (12) For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and therefore the sun.’” (14) “Because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die.”

But, although by his own judgment David deserves to die, God spares him, as we read in v. 13: David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And Nathan said to David, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.”

Just so, God in his mercy does not deal with us according to our sins, but reconciles us to Himself through Christ. Paul asserts in his second letter to the church at Corinth, Chapter 5, v. 18-19: “God through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”

Perhaps our review of Nathan's pronouncing judgment on David can help us to see that we blithely assume the ministry of reconciliation, beseeching others to be reconciled, when we ourselves will not be reconciled.

Let us pray:

Most merciful and loving Heavenly Father, who are ever ready to forgive us if we only ask it, we confess our sin to Thee. Teach us humility, that we may say, "We have done wrong, and even now are doing wrong." Remove from our minds hatred, prejudice, and contempt for those not of our own race or color, class or creed. We stand in awe before Thy goodness and graciousness and long to learn from Thee how to love. Grant that we may respond to Thy love and possess thy power to overcome the divisions that keep us from communion with our fellow man and with Thee. We beseech Thee to continue to spare us, to seek us, to love us. Inform our hearts with Thy love that we may indeed become ministers of Thy reconciliation. We pray in the name of Him who reconciled us to Thee.

Amen