

## August 1, 2021 | Summer Worship Service

TEXT: [Psalm 51](#)

TITLE: "Muddy and Merciful Waters"

By Kathryn Ophardt

"Against you alone—against God alone, have I sinned." That's what David says in Psalm 51. When I read that, I thought, 'maybe David and I didn't hear the same story.' Maybe David didn't hear Nathan list David's sins, so let's let's go over that again, just so we're all on the same page. Nathan said to David on behalf of God, "Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in God's sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites." At the very least, David committed adultery and murder, not to mention the question of consent in his interaction with Bathsheba. At the very least, David's sin hurt two people. He hurt Bathsheba and Uriah.

But that is too simple. When we hurt people, we don't just hurt them, we hurt those who care about them. Part of our humanity is our interconnectedness. Our connection to other people is core to our identity, to how we love, and to how we feel loved. A word for this is solidarity. There are lots of other people in this story who were hurt who go unmentioned. When David slept with Bathsheba, he hurt both Bathsheba *and* Uriah. When David killed Uriah, he also Bathsheba and he hurt Uriah's family—his parents, his siblings, his friends, and took away any chance of children that Uriah and Bathsheba could have had from that time on. All of those people are hurt by the sins that David committed, because all of those other people whether named or not, whether they knew the nature of Uriah's death or Bathsheba's pregnancy, they were all hurt—hurt by the actions, hurt by the secrets, hurt by watching the pain of their loved ones suffer.

This is the ripple of sin in the world that hits like a tidal wave against the people closest to it and then flows further and further out until it blends into the natural rhythms of the water we're all swimming in. Whether this tidal wave is institutionalized so that it wipes out whole groups of people and pushes them to the margins, or whether this tidal wave bears the face of a family member or friend, the tidal wave of sin is deeply personal and affects *real people* and the *people who really love them*.

So, where's the good news? The good news is that God is wading in those same water with us. As much as we are connected by our solidarity with one another, God is in radical solidarity with us! I believe that God felt whatever Bathsheba felt when David called her into his quarters. I believe that God felt what Uriah felt when he was betrayed and killed by the order of his king. I believe that God grieved with everyone who was hurt in this situation. And I believe that God continues to feel our pain with us today. This is that whole Matthew 25 thing, right? It's that whatever we do unto one another, we do unto God! So in a way, David was right when he said that he sinned against God because whatever we suffer, God promises to suffer with us. Whenever we heal, forgive, or reconcile, we do that with God too.

But even this is too simple. Because the truth is that we are messy beings. We sin and we are hurt by sin. Our mess muddies the water. There aren't clear sides. The sinners can't just stay over there while the righteous stay safely on this side because then one hand might belong over here while the other hand belongs over there and we just can't get our foot out of our mouth in the meantime. David is in the muddy waters. David is both "a man after God's own heart" *and* he is an adulterer and a murderer. We don't know what

Bathsheba and Uriah's sins were, but they were human, so they were probably messy people too. So, what does God do with all our mess? God joins us in the muddy water!

Maybe it's time to explore what this water really is. The mud is our mess and we're splashing around throwing sin all over the place, but there's something about that water still unites us. We're going to sing a song later that says, "There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea." Soak that in for a moment. Feel yourself floating in a sea of God's mercy that connects you to all people. God surrounds us with God's mercy—mercy for those who sin and mercy for those who are hurt by sin. And we're all in that water together. In fact, we are all baptized in that same muddy and merciful water. It is there that God claims us, there that God stands in solidarity with us, and there that God unites us.

I've been working at a hospital this summer as a chaplain. I knock on doors and see if patients, families, or staff could use some company or care. The patients at the hospital have taught me so much about the muddy and merciful waters we swim in. I've been honored to hear stories of people's greatest regrets, their shame, their guilt, their pain. I have held the stories of people who have given forgiveness, who need to be forgiven, and many people who struggle to forgive themselves. There was one patient who told me their story of forgiveness when a priest came to give them communion before their surgery. They hadn't taken communion in years, but said that they experienced a wellness they had never known before. They felt God forgive them as they shared in the bread and the cup prepared by Jesus Christ. Within the blank walls of that hospital room that was full of sickness and shame, God met this person in the waters of their mess and sin and suffering. God heard their confession and their sincerity, and God gave them a taste of wellness, of forgiveness, and of grace. The next thing they said to me surprised me even more. The patient said, "God was so ready to forgive me!"

Friends, God is so ready to forgive us, but first we have to recognize our wrongs. God is so ready to forgive us, but we have to apologize to the people we hurt. God is so ready to forgive us, but it is hard to fully rest in the wideness of God's mercy until we forgive ourselves. So, God, we need you. Be our guide. Guide us as we ask for forgiveness. Guide us as we forgive. And teach us how to swim together in these muddy and merciful waters.

Amen.