

NHPC, Overland, MO—2/14/18 (Ash Wednesday)

"Human Audacity"

TEXT: Psalm 51: 1-17

God loves us so much that our sins are forgiven. This is essence of our relationship with God.

And yet, God does do not simply forgive our sins. God expects us to repent: to turn away from evil and turn to God. Salvation is a two way street. God is willing to forgive us. We must also be willing to turn to God and ask for forgiveness.

This is a basic principle of Christianity. The human side of this equation requires a high level of human initiative which might make us uncomfortable. I thought about this once as I reread Psalm 51, the traditional responsive reading for Ash Wednesday.

As I responded to verses 1 and 2, I was struck by their audacity. How can we, mere mortals, ask God to forgive us? How dare we speak to God with such bold audacity?

The dictionary defines audacity as *"bold or arrogant disregard of normal restraints."* (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1985.)

In order to ask God to forgive us, we must take the initiative. With boldness, we must be willing to talk to God and ask God to forgive us. What could be more audacious?

This audacious is an essential part of our Christian faith. It requires a willingness to

go beyond normal human restraints to make demands on God.

Ironically, the most pious people often find this difficult to do. With meekness in the voices, we can hear them say, *"We cannot to ask God to forgive us. We are not good enough."*

Nevertheless, God will forgive us only when we are bold enough to turn to God and seek forgiveness. Salvation requires human initiative, even audacity, so that we have the gumption to approach God and ask God to forgive our sins.

Human audacity is grounded in our conviction that God will forgive our sins. Listen again to the first verse of Psalm 51.

***"Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your loving kindness;
in your great compassion
blot out my transgressions."***

(Psalm 51: 1.)

Notice the double reference to God's forgiving qualities. The Psalmist proclaims both God's *"loving kindness"* and *"great compassion."* Perhaps the Psalmist was only trying to stroke God, butter God up so that God would be in a more forgiving mood.

And yet, surely we believe the author of Psalm 51 was sincere in his belief that God is loving and forgiving. With trust in God's mercy, the Psalmist was bold enough to come to God to ask for forgiveness. A profound conviction that God is merciful makes human audacity before God possible.

Of course, there is a negative side to human audacity. Human disregard for normal restraints is what gets us in trouble in the first place. We often think we know what is best, so we disregard the restraints God gives us. This is the root cause of sin.

Psalm 51 is closely associated with King David. It is often called "David's Psalm." I am not sure that David would have appreciated such a close identification with this psalm because it recalls a sad and sordid chapter in his life. The title of the Psalm makes the connection: "*A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone into Bathsheba.*"

I am sure that most of you know the story of David and Bathsheba. David was King of Israel. Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the Hittite who was off at battle.

To make a long, and sinful, story short, David slept with Bathsheba and she became pregnant. David recalled Uriah from battle, but he refused to sleep with his wife. David ordered him sent back to battle and placed him on the front line where he was killed. It was a plot to cover up David's sin with Bathsheba. But the prophet Nathan would not let David off the hook.

He came to the king and told him a parable of a rich man who had many sheep, but took the one and only lamb of a poor man when he needed to prepare a meal for a guest.

David was outraged at the sin of this rich man and was prepared to punish him when

Nathan dropped the bombshell: David was the rich man. David had violated the law. By his own admission, David deserved punishment for these sins.

At a later date, an editor of the Book of Psalms linked this incident to Psalm 51. He understood the connection between this episode in the life of David and the human need to beg for God's forgiveness when we have messed up our lives. It was David's audacity that got him into trouble in the first place.

He was so bold that he violated moral restraints about adultery. He colluded to make Bathsheba's husband look responsible for the pregnancy. When that failed, he colluded again to have him killed. Human audacity makes us sink deeper and deeper into sin.

Human audacity is also the key to forgiveness. When we are bold enough to ask God for mercy, forgiveness of our sins is possible. When we transform natural, but often sinful, audacity into confession and repentance, God will forgive us. Martin Luther once said, "*If you are going to sin, sin boldly.*" Likewise, be bold when you ask God to forgive you.

Needless to say, sincere repentance is also a requirement. Before you can be forgiven, you must be willing to confess your sins and be truly sorry for them.

Nonetheless, proclaim your repentance boldly. This is our calling on Ash Wednesday. Do not be timid. Do not hold back.

Be bold in proclaiming your sin. Be audacious in asking God's forgiveness. God will not forgive us if we hide our lives from God and if we are reluctant to be honest with God about our sins. Be bold in your confession of sins God will forgive you.

Let us pray. "To Jesus Christ, who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests of his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." AMEN