

**First Presbyterian Church
Southampton, New York
“My Bad”**

**Jeremiah 31:31 – 34
Psalm 51:1 – 12**

Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 22, 2015

I'm pretty sure that I remember the very first time I ever heard it. I believe it was in the Whitely Gymnasium at Princeton Seminary, sometime during my days there back in the early 1980s. I was playing in a pick-up basketball game after class one afternoon... something that a bunch of us students did on a pretty much daily basis; and one of the guys on my team threw a pass to another guy, who had beaten his defender and was now running straight to the basket. And this guy was wide open; I mean, a good pass would have resulted in an uncontested layup... an easy two points. Unfortunately, the pass was *not* good... in fact, it was terrible. And it went sailing over the outstretched hands of the wide open player... ricocheting off a bunch of athletic bags and water bottles piled on the floor on the far side of the gym.

And it was as we turned around and jogged back to the other end of the court to play defense... that I heard it. Over the sounds of squeaking sneakers, and bouncing balls, and the general huffing, and puffing, and panting of all the players... I heard my teammate, the one who'd thrown the lousy pass, say, to no one in particular, “*my bad.*”

I didn't think anything of it, and it really didn't register... and, to be honest with you, I had no idea what the guy was talking about. But then, a few minutes later, I heard it again. This time a player from the other team *didn't* pass the ball when he should have, and instead forced up a horrible jump-shot... which clanged off the rim and bounced high over the backboard and out of bounds. After which *he* said, again to no one in particular, “*my bad!*” Well, this time it *did* register, and I remember thinking to myself, “*What's bad? Who's bad? Why are you bad? What the heck do you mean?*”

Anyway, the game ended and we all went home, and I promptly forgot about the whole thing... amid all my reading, and writing, and studying for various exams. But, sure enough, the next time we hit the basketball court, I heard that phrase again... and, as the game progressed, I realized that I was starting to hear it repeatedly. “*My... bad!*”

And after struggling all afternoon to make sense of this mysterious two word exclamation, I finally figured out that “my bad” meant “my mistake!” “My goof-up!” “My *bad* play!” I don't know how the expression originated, I don't know where it came from, and I don't know who said it first. But, somehow, a whole new way of saying “I blew it!” had entered the lexicon of American athletics... and I was just then learning about it. And, from that point forward, *I* starting saying it, too. And saying it pretty frequently, as it turns out... as my basketball skills weren't all that swift in those days! I made a lot of “bad” plays!

Now, today, of course, “my bad” is a very common figure of speech... and a great many people either use it, or at least know what it means. And while “my bad” may be a great expression to use during basketball season... for us in the church, it’s also just the thing for the *Lenten* season, too. Because, as we know, Lent is a time for us to admit our goof-ups, sins, and mistakes... and then seek the Lord’s mercy and forgiveness for them. It’s a time for us to honestly take stock of our lives, say “my bad” in the areas where we’ve been dropping the ball, and then commit ourselves to doing better in the future. And that’s a theme that we hear proclaimed, over and over again in the pages of Scripture... including in our lesson this morning from the book of Psalms.

Now, I’m quite sure that the Psalmist never said, or ever heard anybody else say, “my bad.” But I’m equally sure that he knew all about the concept... and that confession and repentance were significant features of his overall theology. And we see that fact demonstrated in our text today from Psalm 51. According to the superscription attached to the beginning of this Psalm, this is a “*Psalm of David...*” written after “*the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.*”

As I noted earlier, King David, in spite of everything about him that was great, and noble, and God-blessed... King David could be as wrong-headed, self-absorbed, and disobedient as anybody. And in the matter of Bathsheba, he reached a truly epic level of sinfulness. Because, not only was he guilty of seducing a married woman... he also cunningly arranged for the battlefield death of this married woman’s faithful husband, in the effort to conceal his misbehavior. I mean, it’s truly a shocking story of injustice and evil... especially as the wrongs were committed by God’s hand-picked king, the greatest leader that Israel would ever know.

So, in the matter of Bathsheba... David had fouled up about as badly as it was possible to do. And, not surprisingly, Almighty God was *not* going to let him just get away with it... and carry on like nothing had ever happened. And, as the story is related in the book of Second Samuel, David is confronted by the prophet Nathan... who exposes his wickedness; and once David’s misdeeds are brought into the light of day, he confesses his sins, repents of them, and asks for the Lord’s forgiveness. And it’s in reference to *that* event in the life of David that our Psalm this morning speaks. And notice what the Psalmist, speaking as the voice of David, has to say:

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out all my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out my iniquity.”

Now, that’s about as thoroughgoing an expression of “my bad” that you’re ever going to hear! According to the Psalmist, the king, when confronted with the awful truth of his treacherous and adulterous behavior, doesn’t try to hide it, or deny it, or deflect it, or run away from it. He doesn’t attempt to minimize his mistake, or diminish his disobedience. He doesn’t make excuses. He doesn’t have Nathan taken out behind the palace and beheaded, for being the messenger of bad

news. Instead, as the Psalmist tells us, he just owns it. He admits it. He takes responsibility for it. He confesses to Almighty God, “*I am the bad guy. I am the sinner. I am the one who’s done wrong. My bad,*” said King David. “*Not your bad, or her bad, or his bad, or anybody else’s bad... my bad...*”

Now, for a monarch to take such utter and complete responsibility for a misdeed, even for such a serious misdeed as that committed by David, wasn’t exactly a commonplace occurrence in antiquity! A far more likely attitude for a ruler in those days would have been to say, “*So I took this guy’s wife, and then had him killed in battle so I could keep her. What of it? I’m the king! I can do anything I bloody well please!*”

And, obviously, as we’ve seen, David doesn’t do that... which would have been amazing enough, all by itself. But David’s not through because, again according to the Psalmist, David takes things one step further... and actually repents of his evil, pledges himself to do better in the future, and then asks the Lord for strength to accomplish his self-improvement program. Hear the Psalmist once again:

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.” In other words, says David, “*Renew me, Lord, by your power. Strengthen me, Father, by your Spirit. Remake me from the inside out, and from this day forward, help me to be a better man.*”

And, from that day forward, David *was* a better man. Not that he didn’t have to still bear the terrible consequences for his actions with Bathsheba and her now-deceased former husband. No, no, David got no free pass on that... and he spent the rest of his life dealing with the unhappy fallout from that whole sordid affair. But God *did* forgive him. God *did* renew his spirit, and restore his hope, and give him strength to go on and be the leader that his people needed him to be. God did *not* abandon him... even in spite of everything about him that was sinful, and corrupt, and self-indulgent. No, God was *with* him, every day of his life... and because of that, David could still make of his life something good, and noble, and blessed. And all of it was possible, because David was willing to say, “*My bad.*”

Which brings us back to this morning, this fifth Sunday in the season of Lent... and our own need to sometimes say, “my bad,” and then do the work of significant and meaningful repentance. Not that we’re out there like David, ruining lives and destroying people, just to indulge our self-absorbed appetite of the moment. I’m not saying that we’re all so utterly debased that we’d stop at nothing in order to do our thing, and to get our way. No, most of our sins are quite a bit less newsworthy than David’s exploits with Bathsheba. Most of our misbehavior pales in comparison to David’s careless and cavalier destruction of Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband... just to cover his own rear end.

But that doesn’t mean that we still don’t need to humbly stand before our Heavenly Father, and say “my bad...” for one reason or another. Maybe we’ve been unkind, unethical, unforgiving, or uncaring about the suffering of others. Maybe we’ve been selfish, or self-righteous. Maybe we’ve been greedy or ruthless or bigoted or overly concerned about our material possessions.

I'm sure that each of us has our own unique laundry list of things for which we could, and should, stand up and say... "my bad." And whatever sins and mistakes happen to be on **your** list... I encourage you to do that very thing; today, this morning, right now. I encourage you, and I challenge myself, to dare to be like David... and lay before our gracious Lord everything about us that's goofed-up and corrupted, and allow Him access to our hearts and souls to forgive us, and to set us right again.

I encourage us to be genuinely penitent... to not only confess our sins, but to take some steps to do something about them. To learn from our mistakes; to grow from our errors and setbacks; to give God a chance to really make us over in here where it really matters. I encourage us to trust our great and loving God... that He has no interest in frying us for our sins, but rather in saving us from them; and helping us to be the men, women, and young people that He really wants us to be. That's good news, don't you think? And with us, as with David, it all gets started when we have the courage to say... "my bad."

Where in your own life, in the depths of your own heart, do you need to say to our Heavenly Father, "my bad?" Whatever it may be, may we all be encouraged to do so... and our life with our Lord will be better than it's ever been before! That's His promise... and that's our hope! In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen!