

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
July 19, 2015**

**2 Samuel 15:1-6**

**Eight Deadly Sins: GOSSIP**

- 1. Absalom's conspiracy**
- 2. Our tendency toward gossip**
- 3. Christ's righteousness**
- 4. Guidance for the forgiven**

Hymns: "As the Deer" – 236 –  
Distribution hymns: 459, 314 – 260

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

**2 Samuel 15:1-6 –**

***In the course of time, Absalom provided himself with a chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead of him. He would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate. Whenever anyone came with a complaint to be placed before the king for a decision, Absalom would call out to him, "What town are you from?" He would answer, "Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel."***

***Then Absalom would say to him, "Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you."***

***And Absalom would add, "If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that he gets justice."***

***Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him.***

***Absalom behaved in this way toward all the Israelites who came to the king asking for justice, and so he stole the hearts of the men of Israel.***

What is your most valuable earthly possession?

Perhaps you'd need to think about that question. What possession in this world is your most valuable possession? Could it be:

- Land or real estate that you own?
- A terrific vehicle that you purchased?
- Your home?
- Your boat?
- Investments in your portfolio?
- Special jewelry that you have to keep locked away?
- Something else?

Actually, yes, it is something else. A Bible verse will help us identify it. **Proverbs 22:1 says, "A good name is more desirable than great riches. To be esteemed is better than silver or gold."**

What is your most valuable earthly possession? It is none other than your good name, your reputation. Why is this so? Because our good reputation results in people respecting us, trusting us, interacting with us, and even doing business with us. We see how valuable our good name is in the difference between repairing a broken reputation vs. a broken bank account. You could lose your million dollars and earn it back. You could repair your boat or your home. But your reputation? Once that's lost it takes much time and effort to win back the trust and respect of others. Perhaps you've unfortunately had to go through that process!

As we continue our sermon series on "**Eight Deadly Sins**," today we will discuss the importance of people's reputations as we consider the sin of GOSSIP. In our day and age, how fitting it is to include this sin on the list of traps that Satan sets for God's people. Our sermon text today is 2 Samuel 15:1-6. (Read text)

## **1. Absalom's conspiracy**

This account involves Absalom and his father, King David. What happened long ago in this account that will help us understand the sin of GOSSIP. Some background information might be helpful:

- Before the words of our reading, there had been tremendous trouble in David's household. Much of it had been caused by Absalom.
- Due to strife between half-brothers and half-sisters among David's children, Absalom had arranged the murder of his half-brother Amnon.
- He then fled from Jerusalem for three years. King David was upset, but let him go.
- After the three years, on advice of his general, Joab, King David allowed Absalom to return to Jerusalem, but would not see him for two years. When Absalom pleaded to be reconciled at the end of two years, King David agreed and the two were reunited at the palace.

Then we hear the words of our text. How could this be? Despite the mercy and forgiveness of King David, his father, Absalom proceeds to hatch a plan to embark on a quest to become the king. **He planned to do it by attacking his father's reputation.**

As we digest this account, it would be good to identify a couple terms that are relevant today:

- **Slander** – Slander is speaking false words and lies to destroy another person's reputation. Slander is always false information, and you can even be taken to court for this crime.
- **Gossip** – Gossip is not slander. Gossip is partially or totally true. The fact that there might be truth in the picture, however, does not necessarily give a person the right to be speaking about the subject!

So, consider Absalom's conspiracy. He planted himself outside the city gate and strategically talked to visitors entering Jerusalem. For those who were coming for an audience in his father's presence, Absalom had programmed words to say: *"Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you."* And Absalom would add, *"If only I were appointed*

*judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that he gets justice."* And he would show sympathy and affection for the one who had come to see his father.

Was this gossip or slander? Was it true that the busyness of the daily schedule prevented some from getting their case heard by the king? Or was Absalom telling them an out-and-out lie before they even got to the court? We don't know for sure. But we do know that **he wronged his father by attacking his reputation**, and that the devil used it very effectively to steal the hearts of the Israelites. For he wanted Absalom to be the king as well!

After four years of such behavior, Absalom felt he had the support he needed. You can read through the end of chapter 18 this afternoon to hear the rest of the story:

- Absalom took a posse of men and relocated to his birthplace, Hebron.
- He sent secret messages throughout the country that the trumpet would soon be sounded and he would be the king.
- When that happened, David and his supporters had to flee Jerusalem and regroup.
- In very desperate times, David would muster the army that he could patch together and would have to fight against his popular son Absalom.
- But you know what happens when you fight the Lord's plans. God brought about victory for David, and in one of the more memorable accounts of the Old Testament, Absalom ends up fleeing the battle on a mule, gets his head with his beautiful, flowing hair caught in the branches of the tree, and David's general puts three javelins in his heart as he's stuck in the tree.

**So ended the life of a slanderer.**

## 2. **Our tendency toward gossip**

I would guess that you have never conspired to be king in the way that Absalom did. Yet the

sin of GOSSIP can take many forms today as Satan continues to do his work among us in the world.

Every year in Catechism class when I teach the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment (*"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor"*) we review the sins of gossip and slander, and I ask the class, "Surely these aren't problems in your life, are they? Surely these can't be problems with 12 and 13-year olds, at such a young and tender age, right? Surely these can't be problems that appear in a Christian school where students daily learn about their Savior and are encouraged to follow him, right?" And the answer is always the same; "Ha! If you only knew, pastor!" It seems that even in the controlled, Christian environment of our school, Satan is alive and well and the sinful natures of young people have experienced the sins of gossip and slander pretty clearly.

Scripture describes this sin like this:

- *"A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret."*
- *"He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends."*
- In describing what he had seen in some of the churches of his day, the Apostle Paul warned that some were *"getting into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to."*

**Why does this happen?!** Why do people today gossip and slander against others? Perhaps a few reasons:

- There is a thrill in having the "latest story" and having people to share it with.
- It can stem from frustration or anger against another person, and a desire to have others feel the same about them.
- It could be a conniving plan to put one's self ahead for an advantage in the office or circle of friends.
- Or, I believe there is an interest many have in seeing others meet their

downfall, perhaps even get their just desserts! We are drawn to such stories.

However, the sins of gossip and slander, among other sins of the tongue, are serious matters. Philosophers down through time have noted the power of the tongue and the pen, and have agreed with what James would later write in the New Testament: *"The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison."* (3:4-8) The devil himself used this tactic in the Garden of Eden when he said to Eve, *"Did God really say?... You will not surely die... For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

The Lord also clearly tells us how he will judge the gossip and slanderer. Proverbs 19 says, *"A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will not go free."*

Despite all of this, how sad it is to see the sin of GOSSIP alive and well in our day and age.

- The grapevine grows well in small towns and communities.
- We see it alive and well in break rooms and offices.
- We see it alive and well in school cafeterias and locker rooms.
- And even in church circles, people's business and information – not all of it intended to be public – makes its way around.

The quiet voices in the corner work well for gossipy conversations. But through the blessings of technology, the devil doesn't even have to make people "go house to house" to carry out their intentions. The phone continues to work just fine. Hitting "reply all" on that e-mail message works well too. Facebook has a running ticker 24 hours a day that you can

monitor. Twitter, texting, and Instagram will get messages out at lightning speed. You can even post your latest cause or opinion in a short video on YouTube. **But let's not forget about an important way people sin against others by being willing listeners to the gossip that is being circulated.**

What are people spreading to eager ears?

- What did they buy?
- What was she wearing?
- Who's going out together?
- Students feel the need to commiserate about that unfair teacher.
- And keeping up to date on so-and-so's fertility treatments, marriage problems, or grown son who got in trouble with the law seems so vital.

**Sadly, we all have probably seen the effects of our gossip and slander when friends have been separated, when reputations have been shattered, when someone has gotten so fed up that they have said "I'm sick of this!" and sworn off Facebook or quit that job at the office.**

### 3. Christ's righteousness

For the times that we have fallen into such traps, we need help. We need to look to another. We need to look to someone who has been perfect in every way. We need to look to our Savior.

It's interesting that in the life of Jesus, not only did he avoid the sins of slander and gossip – after all, can you imagine someone seriously saying about Jesus that he was "a talker" – he took the next step in godly living. Christ even spoke up in defense of those who were being unjustly accused. Perhaps you remember the account in Matthew 26 where he defended the believer Mary when she anointed his feet with an expensive perfume: *"When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. 'Why this waste?' they asked. 'This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.'" Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have*

*me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial."*

Jesus spoke up in her defense. He defended her and explained her true motives. **He actively obeyed the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment perfectly for you and for me.**

And when he was slandered and condemned in the high priest's and Pilate's courts, he showed the ultimate example of love. He bore it all and allowed himself to be condemned to be crucified for our sins of gossip and slander. **He died in our place to pay the price of our guilt so that we are forgiven in God's sight. Thank God he has served as our perfect Savior!**

### 4. Guidance for the forgiven

So how can we glorify and honor him now? How can we avoid the sins of gossip and slander? **Scripture has a number of things to say about that:**

- *Proverbs 11:13* – "A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret." The time will come in your life when you must keep the secret. This is easier said than done. Who doesn't want to be the one who has the latest on that situation and who will have people eagerly sitting at their feet to hear? Yet a trustworthy person will learn that there is a time (often!) to keep the secret!
- *Matthew 18:15* – "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." If there is an unfortunate situation to address, even a sin that could be broadcast, the Scriptures tell us that the God-pleasing thing to do is to go to the source. Point out that sin alone, if it is worth addressing. This is the first step to take, even before the other steps of Christian discipline.
- *Proverbs 31:8,9* – "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." As Jesus

did, we may find ourselves in a situation where we need to speak up for someone who is enduring attack or who is not present. As he did, we speak up to defend. We say what must be said. And we pray that God blesses our words.

- *Proverbs 20:19* – “A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.” And finally, might the day come when we have to separate from that friend or those friends who thrive and feed off of busybody chatter? The day might certainly come.

How important this is to learn today, because we are not fooling around with trivial possessions of others. No, when a reputation is broken and trampled on, those who transgress are worse than thieves who have simply stolen wealth. A valuable reputation worth more than gold or silver has been stolen.

May God move us to respect others as he has respected them. And may he use our mouths for the building up of people's reputations as we interact with our church and the world around us! Amen.