

Thursday, August 13, 2020

Sustain in me a willing spirit.

- Pastor Hank French

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit (Psalms 51:10-12)*

I think we have all heard or read the story of King David and Bathsheba, of their adulterous relationship and its deadly consequences. (If not, you can find the story in the book of 2 Samuel, chapters 11 and 12.) David and Bathsheba's behavior "displeased the LORD," and the LORD sent the prophet Nathan to confront David.

When confronted by Nathan, David did not deny his actions; he did not try to make excuses for his actions; he did not try to avoid accountability; he took full responsibility. He confessed to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

Today's devotional text comes from Psalm 51, a haunting poem written by David in which he admits that he has sinned and appeals to God for forgiveness of his sin, but not just forgiveness. He begs God to "cleanse" him from his sin. The psalm begins with these words:

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

And then, in profound words that are part of our traditional Lutheran liturgy, he humbly beseeches: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me." He is not content to be forgiven, he asks God to recreate his heart (his mind and his will) and to recreate his inner character and nature by putting "a new and right spirit" within him. He beseeches God to give him a "willing spirit," a spirit willing to accept God's will as his will.

It is not at all surprising that David's prayer that his mind and will and inner character and nature be recreated to conform to God's mind and will and character and nature becomes our prayer in the liturgy. Bobbi has claimed this prayer for us and posted it on our refrigerator: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain in me a willing spirit.* What a great prayer to start each day with.

Prayer: Yes, Lord. Sustain in me a willing—not willful—spirit. Amen.