

## Scripture: Psalm 51

<sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; According to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. <sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my sin, and cleanse me of my guilt. <sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. <sup>4</sup> Against you, you alone, have I sinned and done that which is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. <sup>5</sup> Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when I was conceived. <sup>6</sup> You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. <sup>7</sup> Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. <sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness; let my crushed bones rejoice. <sup>9</sup> Hide your face from my guilt, and blot out all my sin. <sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. <sup>11</sup> Do not cast me away from your presence, nor strip me of your Holy Spirit. <sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. <sup>13</sup> Then transgressors will learn your ways, and sinners will return to you. <sup>14</sup> Deliver me from bloodshed, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. <sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. <sup>16</sup> For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. <sup>17</sup> The sacrifice acceptable to God is an obedient spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

*Before I show this video introduction and offer the meditation tonight, let me share briefly the back story here. Many of you know, I really like to try to connect faith and culture whenever I can. During the pandemic, Brad and I started watching a crime drama called "NCIS" on Netflix – we hadn't been fans prior to that. In fact, we hadn't paid attention to network shows in a long time. NCIS stands for Navel Criminal Investigative Service, which is a civilian-run organization that serves the Navy and Marine Corps, and the show is a spin-off of the popular 90s drama "Jag". It first aired in the fall of 2003, and is still running 20 seasons later. The finale episode of season 7 (2010) is entitled "Rule 51". The very first time I saw that episode, I said to myself: there's a sermon here. I immediately saw a connection between Rule 51 and Psalm 51. More on that in a short while. So this Lent, I am not going to preach on "NCIS" every week, but I am going to use rules established by the main character – Leroy Jethro Gibbs – on "NCIS" as titles and launch points for my sermons. So to give some context, these are Gibbs' rules. If you'd like an additional fun little game this Lent, see if you can figure which rule I'm going to use each week...*

Video Introduction of the Lenten Theme: Gibbs' Rules (NCIS – CBS)

Rule #51: Sometimes... You're Wrong

*Ash Wednesday – Psalm 51:1-17*

*02/22/2023 – Saginaw First U.M.C.*

*Meditation: "Sometimes We're Wrong"*

*Rev. Amy Terhune*

Sometimes...you're wrong. This is the very understated learning of a former marine named Leroy Jethro Gibbs, portrayed by Mark Harmon in the CBS hit crime drama *NCIS*. Gibbs was serving honorably in Desert Storm in Kuwait in the early 1990s when his wife Shannon (who you saw at the beginning and the end of the video montage I just showed) witnessed a horrific crime back stateside. Being courageous and honorable, Shannon came forward with what she knew. She agreed to testify. And because she was the spouse of a marine, the Navel Criminal Investigative Service agreed to

protect her until the trial date. Tragically, they failed. Both Shannon and their daughter Kelly were murdered by those seeking to stop her testimony, and over in Kuwait, a good marine received the worst news a person can imagine. He nursed a hunger for revenge until he was honorably discharged. And then he followed the trail and took his revenge, unbeknownst to anyone. In that experience, he learned two things. One: that he was good at investigating clues and reading people. Two: that revenge does nothing to assuage pain and grief. So he made a decision – that he would give his life to help others find justice, closure, and safety. Which is how he came to work for NCIS. He leads a fabulous team, one that shifted and changed over 20 seasons. But at the end of season 7, the chickens came home to roost, so to speak, and he learned that not only does revenge not assuage grief and pain, but it widens the circle of grief and pain and destruction and evil. And when all is said and done, he finds that sometimes we do have to say we're sorry, and sometimes the lawyers we don't want to involve can bring peace and grace and justice, and sometimes good is wasted and cases get personal, and messes can't be cleaned up, and we find that not only are we in the wrong, but deep inside, fundamentally, we're wrong.

Now scripture doesn't use the word wrong. Scripture uses the word sin, but in this context, it means the same thing. It refers to the brokenness within. All of us are sinners. And not just sometimes. All of us are sinners all the time. But all of us are also beloved children of God. And not just sometimes. All of us are beloved children of God ALL THE TIME!! So a strange tension lives in us all the time – there's a pull between the two, and sometimes we lean into sin and sometimes we lean into God, but we are always both sinful and beloved.

The obvious solution would seem to be that we should train ourselves to lean into God and away from sin, but alas, it isn't always that simple. Sometimes, in the leaning into God, sin still undermines our footing, tarnishes our motives, causes us to lose balance. Sin can come at us from several directions at once, sometimes.

Psalms 51 is King David's famous lament for his own sin, following a series of arrogant and increasingly horrendous actions. He sees Bathsheba on a roof bathing, he takes her in bed, possibly by force, and then when she turns up pregnant, he tries a series of duplicitous acts to get her husband to lay with her in the hopes he'd believe the child is his. When this fails, he has her husband killed, and he takes her as his own wife. The prophet Nathan, in an act of courage and good faith, calls the King out for this behavior. And David at least has enough shame to admit it. He goes before the people and God to repent his sin. Psalm 51 is that offering of repentance – a plea not only for grace, but to be made right. David doesn't want the wrongness deep within anymore. Create in me a clean heart, O God, he prays, and put a new and right spirit within me – an obedient spirit, a contrite heart. It's a recognition of his arrogance and his need for God.

Sometimes we're wrong, broken, arrogant, cruel, indifferent, consumed by anger or revenge or lust or greed or fear. Sometimes we're our own worst enemy. Sometimes we make bad choices. Sometimes, we inflict our own hurt and suffering on others. Even more, we are mortal. We are finite flesh and blood creatures who will die to this earthly life at some point. We are dust. But we are dust shaped by the Master's hand. We are sinners saved by grace. We are children redeemed by our Savior's sacrificial love for us. Today, we acknowledge the tension between our status as sinner and beloved child. This season, we acknowledge our need for God's redemptive work in our lives. And we do so, not to wallow in dirt, but to acknowledge what God can do with the dust and dirt of our lives. We renew our commitment to believing that God can redeem and restore all that is mired in wrongness. We renew our devotion to being part of God's renewing work not only in ourselves, but in our neighbors, our systems, our planet, our world.

This Lent, don't just give up chocolate or TV or a night out. Give up cynicism. Give up accepting the brokenness. Give up apathy and indifference. Give up grudges and hurt. This is the hard stuff of faith, but it's also the stuff that frees us from the power sin holds on our hearts and minds and spirits. Give up what poisons you. Give up anything that isn't part of the person you want to be. Repent, which does not mean 'grovel'. It means turn around; go in a new direction. Certainly, there's an element of humility to repentance, for we must acknowledge our need and our inadequacies. But this season is all about healing and renewal, because God has declared us valuable, worth redeeming, worth healing, worth saving, worth dying for. Sometimes we're wrong. So Wrong! But God isn't. God is all that is right... light... life... And God has proven his love while we are yet sinners. Hear the good news. Forgiveness is yours. Fresh starts await. New life is possible. For each of us, beloved and sinners all at once, are God's very own. Believe it. And let it shape your heart, your mind, your spirit, your life. And let it live in you until God can use it to shape the world. Amen.