

2Samuel 12,1-15

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

Enough is a feast - this topic will accompany us during our synod. On our first day, however, we contemplate on the theme: Never enough! We are challenged to think about our insatiable human desire for more: more money, more power, more fulfillment, more pleasure, more, more, more...

But when will enough really be enough? When will our deepest desires be fulfilled, our thirst for “enough” quenched at last? I can read the answer in your faces: “Never!” And: you are right!

But isn't it exactly this desire for more which leads to unhappiness, selfishness and greed? Are we not destroying ourselves, others and even our environment because we need to feed our desire for more? How can we deal with this in our church and encourage our members to find helpful alternatives? When we turn to Scripture, we find that this is not a modern problem - it is as old as humanity itself.

Let us read from the second book of Samuel, chapter 12, verses 1-15:

1 The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. 2 The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, 3 but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb that he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. 4 Now a traveller came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveller who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him. 5 David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! 6 He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity. 7 Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. 9 Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. 10 Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the

Hittite to be your own.’ 11 This is what the LORD says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. 12 You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.’ 13 Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. 14 But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die. 15 Then Nathan went home.

What a powerful account about the desire for more getting out of hand - of lust and greed leading to injustice and even murder! The background to this encounter between Nathan and King David is as follows: David relaxes on the rooftop of his palace and sees the beautiful Bathseba taking a bath. He cannot take his eyes off her and wants - yes, needs - to possess her. Although he is told that she is married, he seduces her and she falls pregnant. When his plan to bring her husband Uriah home to Bathseba fails, he organizes that Uriah is murdered in battle. Then he takes Bathseba as his wife and carries on as normal.

But this is not the end of the story. God intervenes. He sends Nathan to David to challenge him and to open his eyes. Nathan carefully and very cleverly tells David a parable since the king was known for his sense of righteousness and justice.

As the story unfolds, we can discover 4 helpful steps to confront our human desire for more:

1. Call the sin by name: David had overstepped the boundaries. He did not follow the word of God, but rather acted as if he himself was God. He took what did not belong to him and misused his position of power. Nathan, however, does not immediately confront David with his own deeds. He makes use of excellent counselling skills and pretends to put a case before the king for him to pronounce a judgement. Nathan tells the parable to unfold before David the extent of his deeds. It is quite obvious that David uses different measures to judge his own behaviour and the behaviour of others. By listening to the parable, the injustice and cruelty become clear to the King and he pronounces the verdict: *“The man who did this deserves to die!”*

Nathan replies: *“You are the man!”* What a shock! It is as if Nathan puts a mirror in front of David and says: You have pronounced your own death-sentence! David is utterly devastated and shattered as his sin is exposed.

We are not David, though. If we think about desire for more, a name like “Guptah” might cross our minds, but surely not our own. We think of the minister of finance who has to reprimand government officials in his budget speech - but our own spending does not feature. Maybe we are even more innocent in our own view when it comes to murder or adultery. But let us remember that Jesus says in the sermon on the mount that murder and slander are just the same and that it doesn't matter whether adultery takes place in our bed or in our head - in all instances we are guilty of violating the commandments of God.

Dear brother, dear sister! Let us allow today and during this time of synod that our desire for more is called what it actually is: sin. And let us be prepared to be confronted with our sinful behaviour; with the the damage our desire for more causes! Where today do *we* need to hear: “*You* are the man!” “*You* are the woman!” ? Where do *I* need to look into Nathan's mirror and hear: *You* are the woman! Where do I greedily take what does not belong to me? Where do I encourage my daughter to strive to live up to the expectations of beauty and sexiness of our time? Where do I misuse the power or responsibilities entrusted to me? Where does my selfish behaviour and my desire for recognition cause hurt to others? Where does my desire for more cause me to turn a blind eye to the poverty and need which confronts me every day?

Let us call our own sins by name and let us not stop there. But let us as church be courageous as Nathan and expose injustices and sin where we see them in our congregations and in our society. Let us exercise our prophetic task and be a voice for those who suffer because others need to feed their desire for more.

The second step to confront our desire for more is: **(2.) Repent and confess:** Nathan helps David to realize that he was no longer able to see and be thankful for all the gifts God had bestowed on him: anointed kingship, deliverance from his enemies, power, belongings, many wives, children and much more. He forgot about God's gifts and concentrated on what he could not have. This led him to adultery, corruption and even murder. Now David can do nothing but repent and confess: I have not only sinned against other people - *I have sinned against the Lord!*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Are we truly thankful for God's gifts in our lives? Are we thankful for our belongings, our families and friends, our jobs and our opportunities and ready to share what we have with others? Or do we continuously want more; do we take out loans for cars and luxuries that we cannot

really afford just to be accepted and to feel that we fit in with the people around us? Do we go to the utmost extremes when organizing birthday parties for our children or even special events in our congregations? We have to ask ourselves today: How do we; how do I contribute to the problem? To whom do we compare ourselves - is our "enough" realistic or do we feed our greed to the point of self-destruction and even marginalization of others?

It is not easy - in fact, it is painful to admit our mistakes and sins. It is hard not to hide behind others or to find excuses for our sinful behaviour but rather to repent and to confess our sins and our guilt. But: repentance and confession open the way for change and a new beginning. Let us not hesitate during this synod to repent and to confess where we have failed. Not just as a church - also as individuals: All of us who are in positions of power or responsibility for others: parents, teachers, pastors, employers: Let us repent and confess where we have misused our power or responsibility and have caused hurt and injustice. It will help us as church and as individuals to gain credibility where we own up and confess where we have sinned against the Lord and our fellow human beings.

The third step to confront our desire for more, is to **(3.) receive forgiveness**. David has hardly uttered his confession, when Nathan offers God's forgiveness to him and says: "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die." Doesn't this forgiveness come a bit too quickly? Doesn't it seem like cheap grace - should David not be called to make amends first? No. The promptness of the forgiveness is intended and it is of great theological significance. Why? Because: We can never earn God's forgiveness - not even by a repentful heart or confession of our sins. God's gracious forgiveness is a gift from him to us and it is unconditional. And when we experience his undeserved forgiveness, it is also an encouragement to change our ways and turn from our sinful behaviour.

In our church we have many opportunities to receive God's forgiveness - confession and worship services, holy communion as well as confession and prayer with fellow christians. Let us realize our neediness for God's gracious forgiveness and make use of these opportunities as often as we can. Forgiveness liberates us to make a new beginning; it opens up new perspectives. When Nathan says to David: "*The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.*" he does not mean: "Carry on like before" but rather implies: "You can change your behaviour!". How do we treat people in our church who do confess their sins? Do we as church; as congregation offer them a chance for a new beginning?

God offers each one of us this chance - you and me - today. His forgiveness has a face and a name: Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ died for our sins on the cross and conquered death to offer us eternal life. In Christ, God makes a new, fresh start with each and every one who accepts his forgiveness and wants to live in relationship with him.

Dear congregation, as we are gathered here for a few days to deliberate on the topic: "Enough is a feast" - let us use our time wisely. Let us talk honestly to each other and admit our need for forgiveness to one another. Let us accept the chance for a new beginning which God offers us. And if there is a burning confession in your heart - do not hesitate to find a fellow believer and pray together during these days and experience the feast of forgiveness.

The last and fourth step to confront our desire for more, can be called: **(4.) Face the consequences.** Although David receives forgiveness, his child will have to die. Furthermore, there will be political unrest in his kingdom and the spiral of violence which he started, will climax in his son Absalom taking his father's wives for himself. Forgiveness does not mean that sinful deeds will not have hurtful consequences. Forgiveness does, however, mean that the sinful deed is separated from the person. God forgives the person, but the deed and its repercussions cannot be eradicated. David is ready to face the consequences. He does not blame Bathseba for his adultery, neither does he accuse one of his military officials of being responsible for Uriah's death. No, he owns up and he lives with the destruction his wrongdoings caused. When God forgives a person his or her sin, he empowers him or her to deal responsibly with the hurts and devastation this sin has caused.

Are *we* ready to face the consequences of our desire for more? Do we realize and admit how our irresponsible, selfish exploitation of the environment will impact on the next generations and are we ready to put in our best effort to protect the environment wherever we can? Are we committed to work actively towards eradicating racism and discrimination in this country in our daily lives? Are we ready to cut down on our spending on luxuries; on our greedy desire for more in order to support people who do not have enough; who do not have the bare necessities to survive? Are we prepared to be content with the "enough" of our lives?

Coming back to David and Nathan. This account was taken up in the historical writings of Israel. It is part of God's history with his people. Even the most glorious King of Israel remains a sinner. And God forgives him and uses him to

lead his people. Although this happens in the time of the Old Testament, it links in with what Martin Luther describes as: simul iustus et peccator. Being a sinner and justified at the same time. Simul iustus et peccator - this is true also for the ELCSA (N-T). We as church do not need to pretend that we are better than others; that we are perfect - rather we find ourselves to be on the one hand sinners in need for forgiveness and on the other hand justified sinners with a prophetic voice and task in our church and society.

Never enough! Yes, we are guilty of the desire of humans for more - as a church and as individuals. Admitting our guilt and confessing our sinful behaviour, we may however receive God's forgiveness and deal responsibly with the consequences of our actions. May God help us to use this opportunity of synod to go through the steps of dealing with our desire for more - in order that we may experience that enough needs not be an unfulfilled, insatiable desire but that enough can be a feast! Amen.

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