

The dramatic moment looked like this. The first born of King David was caught by his long hair in the Oak branch, as he fled on the mule from the men of General Joab. When Joab came to the scene, he took three darts from one of his men, and plunged them into Absalom's heart, as he dangled helplessly from the tree.

Why would Joab want to kill the king's beloved son? It all began with a simple look. Actually, it was more than a look. It was more like scoping. The scoping then stirred the libido of an idle king. Then it led to the rape of a housewife, then the pregnancy, then the conspiracy to kill her husband, then to the death of the husband who was actually a very loyal subject of the king.

Christians traditionally blamed Judas Iscariot as the poster child of all betrayal, but this is the foremost example of all betrayals: you cannot find a better example of betrayal than that of King David's against his

own loyal subject, Uriah the Hittite.

Time tends to dull the painful memories of the past. We forget the pain, and most of us are able to move on. Or, at least we want to believe that we are moving on. That is probably what King David believed. He had a life to lead, a nation to run, and a new wife to console. And she bore him the second child whom the Bible says God loved: the baby who would be King Solomon. The pain of the past seemed gone for good from the memories of the people.

Then someone gave a tug that began the wheel of the prophecy to turn—the one that Nathan revealed to King David. It was one of David's own sons, Amnon, who caused the wheel to turn. Ironically, just as it all began with his father, it was the libido of the young man that caused the wheel to turn. Tragically, it was directed at Amnon's half-sister, Tamar, whose brother was the first son of the king, Absalom.

**O**ne day, Absalom found the opportunity to avenge the shame Amnon put upon his beautiful sister, Tamar. Absalom ordered his men to slay Amnon with the edge of the sword. Thus the Nathan's prophecy began its fulfillment:

Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me... (II Sam. 12:10a)

But it was not the end. There was more where it came from. Absalom ran away after the murder. General Joab realized that King David still loved Absalom, so he devised a ploy to influence the King's heart. So Absalom was allowed to return, and he did not have to face any punishment, thanks to Joab whose skills smoothened out a few tough wrinkles.

**A**bsalom soon forgot how much he owed to everyone, especially to Joab, and began to build up his own private army. Which general would tolerate the army that does not answer to his

command? That could not have pleased Joab. Absalom began to gather the support of the nation, and he eventually led the coup against his own father, and took over Jerusalem. David came out of the retreat, and struck back at the rebel force, but with the order not to harm his beloved son, Absalom. But his trusted general, Joab, who previously followed his king's order to kill Uriah, felt no love for Absalom. After all, this was the thanks he got, when he saved his sorry hide from the punishment a murderer should deserve. When Absalom's long hair was caught in the tree, Joab did not waste a moment to put an end to his annoying problem.

The father committed the sexual sin, and to cover it up, a murder. One of his sons committed the same sexual sin, but against a daughter of the king. Then the first born of his sons murdered the son who raped his daughter. Then the first born son whom the king adored turned against his own father, and took the throne. Then, despite the king's order not to harm the wayward son, the

same general whom he bid to kill Uriah also killed the king's son. This was not a soap opera. This was real.

**“O** my son Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!” What was going through King David's tormented soul? Somehow the sins of the father trickled down to his children's generation, and his grown-up children played out the same sins the father committed.

What sin does is that it abides by the law of causality: sin causes the effect. Sin always exacts a price from the sinner. Sin also sets off the chain reaction of effects. Even if there is the forgiveness of the sinner, those who are around the sinner must bear the effects of the sin in their lives.

**I** remember when I first came to Lake Tahoe on the way to CA in mid-nineties. We stayed one night in a nice hotel overlooking the blue water. The hotel had a huge casino above the lobby.

Until then, the only casino I ever saw was the ones in James Bond movies. So I had to see it with my own eyes. So I dragged my wife and carried my 18 months-old son down to the casino.

The first thing I felt, as I approached the casino was this invisible wall of cigarette smoke that stabbed my eyes.

Immediately, I was concerned with the welfare of my baby riding in the carrier on my chest. But being a stubborn male, I decided to venture just a little anyway. But I gave up, after about 10 steps into the casino, because I could not stand the irritation to my eyes and the airways. It was that bad. I knew it was a mistake to walk in there with the baby. I complained out loud, how people could spend hours there.

Once we were outside, I noticed it: my clothes smelled like cigarette smoke. My baby smelled like cigarette smoke. I just visited the casino only for looking around, did not play the machine, and stayed for only

maybe 30 seconds, but I still smelled like casino.

**S**in is like that. Sin causes an effect on people who live in the same place with the sinners. Likewise, as long as one is located in the human society, one cannot stay insulated from the effects of the society's sin—even if one did not commit the particular sin.

This is why bad things happen to good people. The sins of other people tangle those who did not commit the sin. But because they happened to be around the sinner, they become involved, and suffer the effects. Knowing this, people attempted to insulate themselves from the sinful surroundings by establishing isolated, but self-sufficient, communities—such as monasteries and other communes. People can try to live in a gated community, away from the sinner and criminals; but they cannot escape from their own sinfulness.

**E**veryone knows not to go to a theater or mall, when there is a flu going around. That is because people are smart enough to know that flu is contagious. If you know you are weak in the physical constitution, you will make sure to avoid any situation that might expose you to the flu virus, even if it means skipping the church on Sunday. First of all, we are smart enough to know that the surrounding affects us. Second of all, we know we will catch something from where people congregate.

How would you take it, if you found out that your neighbor who told you he would not attend the worship because of the pandemic, did not miss the Christmas sales at the local department stores? If it meant getting a good deal, it was a compelling reason enough for the neighbor. He would convince himself to take the chance. He would convince himself that he will be alright, because it would be just 15 minutes, tops.

Your neighbor knows exactly what he wants to get. He tells himself, "I will beat the frenzied crowd, in and out quickly, and I will try not to breathe too much while in there." Then he comes home triumphantly, and kisses his wife and children in gladness of the successful hunting trip, although it took almost an hour to get through the line at the cashier.

People believe that they will fare just fine, because they think they are good enough and moral enough people. So they would take the risk. The economic gain is worth taking the risk. It is just this one time only. And it was just one time only for King David, too.

**I**s it possible for a righteous man to remain unscathed in the unrighteous surrounding? The answer is no. We have been already affected by the effects of the sins of other people. The others have been affected by the sins of our own. No one is righteous in the human society, and that is why Paul declared

such an offensive statement (Rom. 3:22b, 23a):

**For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...**

Some might object to it, saying, "Hey, I am not a sinner!" Ironically, even Jesus said this: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone (Mk. 10:18)." Who among us seriously tell onself that he or she is good?

We do not become saved, and enter the kingdom of God, because we are righteous, but because we were forgiven of our sins, and justified with the robe of righteousness, on the account that some one else paid for our sins. That someone is Jesus our friend, our Lord and Savior. Those who trust in his name are deemed righteous by God, and Apostle Paul gave his life to witness to this truth.

**T**hen a thinker would say, what is the point of striving for justice, if our action cannot make us

righteous, and if we should remain unclean, even if we did not commit the sin ourselves? Is it our fault, if the passing car splashed the mud on our clothes? What is the point of trying to keep the clothes mud-free, while walking in the middle of the muddy street?

Not surprisingly, some people did not like getting splashed with the soup of mud and other refuse, so that they thought up a few ways to minimize the damage. People invented the boardwalk, sidewalk, cobble stones, asphalt, storm drains, sewers, traffic regulations, etc. You do not need to give it up, because the street is muddy.

**T**here is this intention, the end purpose, to make life better for everyone to live. And that intention of the heart is what matters to God. God told Prophet Samuel (I Sam. 16:7b):

...for the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.

God knows that we are not perfect beings. But God expects us to give it a try, despite our imperfection. God expects us to embody the intention of making life better for everyone, and do something within our power to make it come true. That is why social justice is the necessary part of the spiritual quest, even though it seems futile, given the pervasiveness of sin and injustice in the human society.

**A** thinker would ask: why did Jesus not give it up and focus, instead, on his own career and economic interest? Did he not know that his ministry was just a drop in the bucket, compared to the overwhelming pervasiveness of human evil and sin? At most, the effect of his ministries could not have amounted any more than the small geographic area of Judea and Samaria.

Then the thinker should also ask: why didn't people just give up and not invent sidewalks and asphalt and storm drains and traffic regulations? Was it all worth inventing and putting them

to use? Of course, it was! No one would ever dream about reverting to the streets of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There is a plenty of reasons to seek justice with peace in our society and the world, because its reward is great.

There was this particular intention that fired up Jesus. He could not let things go the way it had been. Because he believed that there was a better way, and it was worth exchanging his own life for it. He said (John 10:10b):

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

May each and every one of us be inspired by this intention, and have this life, and have it abundantly.