

**Found Out**

*II Samuel 11:26-12:13a; Ephesians 4:1-16*

Former president Barack Obama lamented the rise of “strongman politics” and “the utter loss of shame” among political leaders who repeatedly lie during a recent speech in South Africa that was widely seen as aimed in part at his successor.

Speaking at an event honouring the late Nelson Mandela Obama did not mention President Trump by name and cast his concerns far more broadly, warning against movements toward authoritarianism globally.

But Obama made several remarks that came across as thinly veiled criticism of President Trump, who during a summit in Helsinki just the day before appeared to place more trust in Russian President Vladimir Putin than in the U.S. intelligence officials who concluded that Russia interfered in the 2016 U.S. election.

“I am not being alarmist, I’m simply stating the facts,” Obama told a crowd in Johannesburg. “Look around - strongman politics are ascendant...where those in power seek to undermine every institution or norm that gives democracy meaning.”

Obama’s speech also contained criticism of stances President Trump has taken on climate change, immigration and other policies.

“You have to believe in facts,” Obama said. “Without facts there’s no basis for cooperation.”

“I can’t find common ground if somebody says that climate change just isn’t happening, when almost all the world’s scientists tell us it is,” Obama continued. “I don’t know where to start talking to you about this. If you say it’s an elaborate hoax, where do we start?”

At a time when independent fact-checkers are challenging President Trump about his misleading and false statements almost daily, Obama also took aim at politicians who lie, as well as those who attack the news media.

“People just make stuff up,” he said. “They just make stuff up. We see the utter loss of shame among political leaders where they’re caught in a lie and they just double down and they lie

some more. It used to be that if you caught them lying, (there would be some embarrassment at being found out). Now they just keep on lying.”<sup>i</sup>

Nobody likes being found out. Nobody likes having their faults, their failings, their weaknesses brought into the public view. It's shaming. It's embarrassing. It's unthinkable. The American author Mark Twain is said of a sent a telegram to twelve of his friends with the words, “All is discovered, flee at once.” They all left town immediately.

David, one of the greatest kings of Israel, founder of the city of Jerusalem, writer of the Psalms, slayer of Goliath, was an uneasy man. He used his power to get what he wanted on occasion. Perhaps the most terrible story was his desire for Bathsheba, a married woman he coveted. So much so that he arranged for her soldier husband to be sent off into battle, in the front rank, where he was duly killed. David could then claim the widow as another of his wives in his harem. It is a story beyond shocking.

But God was watching. Nathan the prophet is sent, and his subtle parable about the stolen lamb finds David out. Thinking the parable true, by his own words of judgement David condemns himself.

“You are the man”, says the prophet.

Found out.

David knew, we all knew, that people of faith are supposed to, “lead a life worthy” as Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians. But we all slip, we all stumble, we all fall short of what we ought to be. And sometimes we are found out. I wonder if it's actually better for us when we are found out. Not pleasant, not easy, but I can't help but feel that if we think we can get away with things, somehow, we are diminished, even if it is only in our own eyes. I point no fingers, I make no judgements, for I am as guilty of falling short as anyone else here today, and even to think about things thought, said and done, things found out and things not found out, almost makes me want to stop right now.

Here's another thought. Beyond the embarrassment, shame and guilt, the fear of judgement and of losing face, perhaps the greatest challenge to being found out is that we are expected to

be different, learn from our lesson, try harder, do better. For some people it's not the judgement that they fear, it's the consequences of the forgiveness.

Last year I was in prison three times. (Behave yourselves!)

On each occasion I had the opportunity to speak to the people on the 'inside'. I can always remember the late, great Norma Ronald talking about her time as a prison chaplain when she would say, "When you go to visit in a prison, you will never have met so many innocent people in your life." In each of the establishments, talking to the men there, the brokenness of their lives was overwhelming. Some could not accept that they were guilty, even though they had been 'found out' by the law. They couldn't move forward with their lives because they couldn't bear to look backward. Even the ones that could sort of look backward to what they had done and been wanted reassurance. I remember sitting with a group of men, some of the most violent and dangerous people I had ever been with, and they wanted to talk. I discovered a little about what they had done after I had been with them, and it was appalling. But the topic they wanted to talk about, in that difficult environment, was forgiveness. One of them said to me, "I know what I have done. Can your God ever forgive someone like me?"

King David realised that the consequence for him of being found out was not simply the realisation of his guilt, and dealing with his shame. It was about facing up to his brokenness and not simply trying to make amends, but to resolve never, ever to do or be like that again.

If you've done the crime, doing the time is important. Making amends is important. But repentance matters too. Not just saying sorry, but living sorry. Not simply turning away from the wrong thing, the bad thing, but turning towards the good things, the right things. Not lost under the stifling burden of guilt but knowing that God can, will and does forgive. You, me, everyone who turns to God.

There are people needing to be 'found out' in this Church. In these pews. There's a person needing to be 'found out' right now in this pulpit. But not simply 'found out' only to be judged and condemned. 'Found out' so that a second chance might be given, guilt might be dealt with, and hope might come. I wonder how many of us allow ourselves to be dominated by a story about

ourselves that controls us, or crushes us, because we know something about ourselves that if others knew, they'd never talk to us again. We know how bad we are, and what we deserve.

The good news, not the glib news, not the whitewash news but the good news, is that God knows too. And God, the God of David, the God of Peter, the God of Paul, the God of Mary Magdalene, the God of the woman taken in adultery, is big enough, kind enough, expansive enough, merciful enough to reach out when we come towards God, and forgive. Like the Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

Desmond Tutu writes: "I would like to share with you two simple truths: there is nothing that cannot be forgiven, and there is no one undeserving of forgiveness...Forgiveness is the journey we take towards healing the broken parts. It is how we become whole again."<sup>ii</sup>

You might fear you are going to be found out, and you don't know where else to go. You might have been found out, and you're here today because you don't know where else to go. You might never have been found out, but you know what *it* is and how it weighs you down.

But know this to be true, every single one of you. Jesus comes to you where you are because He knows that you are not able to rise to where you want to be, to where you know you should be. He comes to you not where you ought to be, but where you are...He comes to **you**. Every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future, with and through the power of the risen Lord!<sup>iii</sup>

Not an easy peace, not an insignificant peace, not a half-hearted peace, but the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**

**Amen**

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<sup>i</sup> John Wagner, Washington Post, 17<sup>th</sup> July 2018

<sup>ii</sup> Desmond and Mpho Tutu, The Book of Forgiving, p3

<sup>iii</sup> William P Barker, A Saviour for All Seasons, p157