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-- Isaiah, Paul, Simon Peter....What do all three of these men have in common in God's word today? Faced with the awesome power of God, they all realized that they were sinful people.

-- Indeed, as Deacon Andy reminded us last week, all of us are sinners. The only perfect man was hung on a cross.

-- But Simon Peter, Paul and Isaiah didn't sit and grovel in their sinful state. God chose them to do his work. He gave them strength and the power of his Spirit. Isaiah become a great prophet to his people. Peter led the fledgling community of Christians. Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles.

-- When we experience God's great power, we realize our sinfulness. We know we fall short of what we are called to be. Nevertheless, God has chosen us to be his disciples, to do his work.

-- Part of that work is to admonish or warn the sinner. Now, that sounds a bit scary to most of us. But that is the classic work of the prophet. And, by our baptism, each of us shares in the prophetic ministry of Christ.

-- Of course, because we are all too aware of our own sinfulness (or at least we should be), warning the sinner is not something we can do with any sense of arrogance or self-importance. And we don't do it to crush someone's self-esteem or "bring him down a notch."

-- To me, the classic example of this ministry in the scriptures is Nathan confronting King David after he has committed adultery and arranged for the death of the husband of Bathsheba.

-- Nathan doesn't simply say *You were wrong!* He tells a story of a king who, instead of taking a sheep from his plentiful herds for a dinner, takes the one lamb of a poor man. David condemns him, and so convicts himself of sin.

-- I know I have needed that type of correction from time to time. And though it's never easy, I have benefitted from loving correction.

-- Paul had the courage to stand up to Peter when he backed out of eating with Gentiles when pressured by his Jewish friends. But his confrontation was out of love, not spite or competition. And he corrected him knowing full well his own sinfulness.

-- Each of us is called to exercise this ministry of fraternal correction from time to time. It's not easy, and it can often be uncomfortable. But we are not exercising true charity if we allow someone close to us to continue down a destructive path.

-- It's not helpful to nag and complain about someone's "bad habits." That will surely turn off the person we are trying to correct. But it's a very different thing to warn a loved one about some sinful and destructive behavior that concerns us.

-- In a few days, we will begin the season of Lent, a season in which we focus on our need for God's mercy and our need to turn around those things in our lives that lead us away from God.

-- May we also pray for the wisdom and courage to help those close to us to turn toward God, even when that means we must warn them about their own sinful behavior.