

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 13, 2010

1 Kings 21:1-10 (11-14) 15-21a

¹Later the following events took place: Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of King Ahab of Samaria. ²And Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, so that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house; I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money." ³But Naboth said to Ahab, "The LORD forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance." ⁴Ahab went home resentful and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him; for he had said, "I will not give you my ancestral inheritance." He lay down on his bed, turned away his face, and would not eat.

⁵His wife Jezebel came to him and said, "Why are you so depressed that you will not eat?" ⁶He said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard for it'; but he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" ⁷His wife Jezebel said to him, "Do you now govern Israel? Get up, eat some food, and be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

⁸So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal; she sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who lived with Naboth in his city. ⁹She wrote in the letters, "Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth at the head of the assembly; ¹⁰seat two scoundrels opposite him, and have them bring a charge against him, saying, 'You have cursed God and the king.' Then take him out, and stone him to death." ¹¹The men of his city, the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. Just as it was written in the letters that she had sent to them, ¹²they proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the assembly. ¹³The two scoundrels came in and sat opposite him; and the scoundrels brought a charge against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, "Naboth cursed God and the king." So they took him outside the city, and stoned him to death. ¹⁴Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned; he is dead."

¹⁵As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, "Go, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead." ¹⁶As soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab set out to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

¹⁷Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying: ¹⁸Go down to meet King Ahab of Israel, who rules in Samaria; he is now in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. ¹⁹You shall say to him, "Thus says the LORD: Have you killed, and also taken possession?" You shall say to him, "Thus says the LORD: In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, dogs will also lick up your blood."

²⁰Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" He answered, "I have found you. Because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the LORD, ²¹I will bring disaster on you; I will consume you, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel;

Luke 7:36-8:3

³⁶One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. ³⁸She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. ³⁹Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner." ⁴⁰Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "Speak." ⁴¹"A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." ⁴⁴Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. ⁴⁵You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were

many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." 48Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." 49But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" 50And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

1Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, 2as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, 3and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

"Life Song"

Ah the scent of carpet glue is still in the air. When the idea of getting new carpeting in the main corridor and in the offices was coming together I was thrilled. In the offices there were places that we had worn through to the concrete. The main passageways were looking tattered.

The downside to new carpeting is everything has to be moved. Everything! We looked on it as an opportunity to clean out and sort through. The office suit is now lighter—literally. The dumpster is heavier—most certainly. Years and years of accumulations—downsized, consolidated, cleaned and cleared.

One of the gems I found was an old single cassette tape player/recorder. Remember those? It was vintage 70's. As I picked it up from where it had been hiding for at least a decade, I thought, "Oh, how cool we have to hang on to that as you just don't find those anymore." Then, I picked it up and my hand encountered something that felt strange.

It was like something once melted but now dried. It was like the remnants of soaked plaster. Upon inspection I turned the nifty little retro unit over only to discover that I had put my hand in the former ooze of the battery cover. With corrosive force its batteries has melted through the battery door on the back.

It was time to let it go. From the front it looked fine, but underneath and on the back side—it was time to let it go. Obsolescence had attacked, but corrosive force had done it in.

Corrosive force. That is the story with Ahab and Jezebel. Ahab wants Naboth's vineyard to use as a vegetable garden. This is not Ahab's primary home, but Naboth's vineyard sits adjacent to this secondary home for Ahab and Jezebel. Ahab wants the land. He's willing to pay Naboth for it or find him a new vineyard.

Naboth is not willing to sell. This is his family land. It is to be passed on in his family from generation to generation—it was not to be sold. Ahab returns to Jezebel unhappy that this transaction has not gone down. Jezebel, with sarcastic tone in her voice, says, "But aren't you the king? Let me handle this for you."

She works behind the scenes. She arranges it so that a false accusation is made and Naboth is done away with—stoned and dead. The vineyard is now Ahab's for the taking. Jezebel and Ahab have accomplished what they wanted to accomplish. They are a corrosive force.

But there is another story too. This story is different from the story of Naboth's vineyard.

In the other story, Jesus has been invited to a dinner party; most likely the dinner party is in Jesus' honor—he is the honored guest. The dinner is at the home of Simon—a prominent Pharisee. It is publicly known that this is where Jesus is for the evening.

As the story goes there is a woman who appears. This woman comes up from behind Jesus and stoops down at his feet. She is weeping. Her tears along with a precious ointment that she carries in an alabaster jar become the washing and anointing elements for the feet of the Lord.

There she is washing his feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair. She is anointing and kissing his feet—massaging and caressing them with her touch, her hands, her lips, her hair. It is this incredible closeness and beautiful expression of love.

She has made herself completely vulnerable here. Women were not prominently featured at such parties—yet we always find them receiving welcoming acceptance with Jesus. Women did not let their hair down in public this way—yet Jesus lifts her up as a model of living fully the compassion God has shown us.

Simon the Pharisee is taken back by what happens there in his home. This woman has invaded and then acted the way she acted. Apparently, the woman's reputation has gone before her. Whatever her sin, it was known and seemingly shameful.

But she does not withhold herself. She does not hang her head in shame and hide in the shadows. Instead she bends down and with her whole self and she beautifully cleanses and blesses the feet of Jesus. This act of hers is passionate and beautiful—it is sensual and a full body expression of herself.

It is authentic. It is real. It is fleshy. It is a full expression of her love for Jesus. It is like a musical composition where all the parts come together in this harmonious way that expresses the deeps of the soul. This is her life song—it is an expression of her full self. It is an expression that is life-giving and life-sharing. It is life song. It is beyond words—ah, when words are not capable music speaks.

That is a very different story from the story of Ahab/Jezebel. Corrosive force vs. Life Song. Two very different stories. Life Song.

Corrosive Force. Which are we? Which are you? Which am I? Am I, are you, are we...the Life Song or the Corrosive Force?

And the answer is... “Yes!” We are both at the same time.

In the story of Naboth’s vineyard, after Naboth is dead Ahab is found in the Naboth’s vineyard that is now Ahab’s new garden. Elijah the prophet appears there, and Ahab says to Elijah, “Have you found me, O my enemy?” Elijah answers, “I have found you. Because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord, I will bring disaster on you; I will consume you...” It is the justice of God that is being proclaimed.

It is that exchange that stands out. “Have you found me?” “I have found you.” It is not about location—ah, I found you here in the vineyard. It is deeper than that—“I have found you” is about the fact that he has been found out. Elijah, and be clear that God does too, sees Ahab for what he is—he has been found out.

This is not how Ahab was to live before God. He has been found out.

In a very real way this is the case with the other story too. The woman has been found out. Her being found out is not about her sin—of which Jesus makes it real clear she has been forgiven. What has been found out about her is the generous, loving, and even powerfully sensual way she lives out in her whole self the forgiveness of God.

Her Life Song is a musical composition of the God she has encountered in Jesus Christ. It is a God who has this generous intention to heal life, to restore relationships, and to forgive the sinful. She has met that God in the person of Jesus and her Life Song of body, tears, hair, ointment, anointing, kissing is the playing out of that loving God.

Yes, we are Life Song. Yes, we are Corrosive Force. Yes...God calls us to awareness of how we live...and in the justice and mercy of God we have the chance this day to diminish the Corrosive Force and play loud the Life Song.

Let your Life Song loose—play it out and play it large. Live in the expressive reality that God is healing our lives, restoring us, forgiving us...loving us...

Ah, breathe it in—it is not the carpet glue—it is the Life Song. It is in you...and as we see in God, it is beyond all the Corrosive Force of the world. Amen.