



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

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Sermon: Rev Dr André Groenewald

Reading: 1 Kings 21:1-16

The text for the sermon:

¹⁵ As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, "Get up and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite that he refused to sell you. He is no longer alive, but dead."

This passage reads like a modern day television soap opera.

When I read it again this week I could almost see the different characters.

- Ahab the mummy's boy king who is like a puppet in his strong foreign wife's hands;
- Jezebel the strong foreign wife of the supposedly "God fearing" king;
- A fake trial with two accomplices who lie;
- A death sentence by the judge;
- Naboth an innocent victim who only defends his birthright;
- Elijah a prophet who brings to Ahab the message of God's justice;
- And then off course there is God behind the scenes working through different episodes.

And like many other dramas there is much irony. Naboth is actually accused of something that both Jezebel and Ahab were guilty of: "cursing" God with their injustice and greed! It is also full of tension because you wonder if Naboth is going to survive.

So what is behind this story? I think the writer is communicating a very important lesson. It was expected of the kings of those times to act justly, defend the rights of the marginalized and care for those who did not have any families at all. It is a lesson to follow the right action when facing a strong NO. Ahab was sulking because someone dared to say

NO to him. He was devastated because he wanted more and more and could not have it.

His wife on the other hand was a foreigner and did not grasp the role of the Israelite kings. In her understanding a king had absolute power of everything. A king in her mind would just grab anything that he wanted to have!

But there was something else. Although Jezebel did not get that Naboth was obliged by the Mosaic law of inheritance not to sell his birthright, she pretty well knew how to use the same Mosaic Law to condemn Naboth to death!

The message: God sees every injustice that takes place. He knows even what the roots of all the injustices are - in Ahab's case greed and in Jezebel's case deceit and ambitious power!

And still to us today the same is true. Although we might joke about God's presence, it is actually true. He is everywhere and He sees all our greed, injustices and deceit.

He knows us as we do not know ourselves. We are indeed so full of sin and greed that we were also condemned to eternal death.

But God is a God of mercy just like He is portrayed in our story. When Ahab showed remorse and humbled himself before the Lord, God forgave him and made his sentence lighter. Likewise did He do the same for us? In Christ Jesus he even went further – He did not make our sentences lighter, he totally wiped them clean. We are forgiven sinners. We are made right with God. We received full pardon of our sins. All that he expects us to do is to live in full obedience to him.

Ahab's problems started much earlier. He married a girl who did not share his belief in God. They did not share their faith in the Almighty God. She convinced him to follow her idol gods and in the process he totally lost focus. He then became a man without any anchor or stability. He started to get greedy because he lost his conscience. He allowed his wife to plan and commit a murder on an innocent God fearing man. He lost his way completely.

And the same will be true for us. We must constantly ask ourselves: Is God still the number 1 in my life? Do I focus on what I want or what He expects me to do with my life? Do I still have a conscience where I know right from wrong, good from evil? Or did I also lose my focus and my conscience? Do I only care for myself and **my** needs?

If you are feeling greedy more often than you should and just want more and more – and in the process damage the lives of other innocent people, do not waste any more time. Go out of this building and focus again on your relationship with God. Focus on the things that He expects you to do and forget the things that you want? If you lied or committed actions of injustices because of greed, go on your knees and say to God that you are sorry.

The story of Ahab and Jezebel reminded me of a story written by Dale Mazurek.

Jake was devastated at his grandmother's funeral. He and granny were always very close. She did live a good life. Granny was 93 when she died and the only cause of death was heart failure due to old age. He knew that granny was loaded and she had promised him a very generous gift at her death. So when he was asked to attend the reading of her will he was obviously excited as any one of us would have been. At the reading there were a number of relatives present. They were all getting small things like furniture, arts, crafts and some even got small amounts of money. Finally the lawyer got to Jake and it was all he could do to hide his enthusiasm. About two minutes later the joyous enthusiasm turned into a very quiet lonely anger. The lawyer read out that granny left the most important gift to her grandson Jake. This was her treasured bible. He told her that granny was quite adamant that this book was her most prized possession.

The bible was about 80 years old and Jake knew that granny had probably read it from cover to cover a number of times. However Jake knew that he wouldn't be following in granny's footsteps. He knew he would never read the bible. Jake left the lawyer's office with a smile on his face but extreme anger in his heart. When he got home he threw the bible in the bottom of his closet and that's where it sat forgotten about until about 3 months later.

He got home from school to find that a water pipe had burst in the house and pretty much formed a river running right through his bedroom using his closet as a dam. When he opened the closet a ton of water came flooding out along with all kinds of ruined possessions of his. Along with those possessions was the bible that his grandmother had given to him upon her death. At first glance he didn't think anything of the bible. He started picking through his stuff to see if there was anything salvageable, when he got to the bible he was about to throw it in the

garbage when something caught his eye. There was a piece of paper sticking out of the middle of the water logged pages. Jake pulled the paper out and was surprised to see that it was completely readable. The water had not ruined it like it had everything else. The pages in the bible were all turned to mush. He realized that the paper was a letter from his granny. He sat on the bed to read it.

Dear Jake:

Hi there sweetie. Well if you're reading this letter then obviously I have died. First of all I would like to say thank you for always being there for me. You didn't wait until I was sick to visit me like an obligation or something. I promised you a special reward at my death and this letter will explain to you how to retrieve it. There are a number of clues throughout the bible. You have to put the clues together and after that you will be able to retrieve your reward.

Jake, I want you to know that this book was my most prized possession. I promise that once you get all the clues it will be very easy to figure out the riddle and then you can collect your reward. The reward is what's left of my estate which is a total of 3 million dollars. I would in no way be happier knowing that you got the money and that you are enjoying it. However there is one catch to this and that is you have to claim the money in 60 days or it will be forever lost to you. In the event you do not claim the funds I have set it up so that the funds are evenly distributed among the homeless in our country. So Jake, thank you and I love you.
Signed: Granny

Jake opened up the bible and saw that there was barely a readable word left in the book. It wouldn't have mattered if there was because granny had been dead for over three months now and the dead line was sixty days.

He just started laughing. He remembered how angry he was. Now in retrospect he realized exactly how greedy he was. He also realized that the biggest rewards could come in the most unusual packages. He couldn't stop laughing as he walked out of his bedroom.

Maybe it is also true of us. There are things in life that money cannot buy like God's presence, his mercy and love, and happiness.

Amen