

All choices have consequences. A sermon preached on August 19, 2018 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons I KINGS 21

ROMANS 2:3-6

Like all good stories,--reviews are given to bring people into the story from where they left off.

So, previously in the Elijah story,

we have this God fired holy man named Elijah entering the King of Israel's palace and saying to Ahab—"Ahab, God has seen the speed and direction of your abandonment of the God of the Exodus, the God of Abraham. Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

You are leading the people into worship of the Canaanite gods—especially the Canaanite fertility god--

Baal

You are married to a Canaanite woman— one Jezebel –and she is encouraging you and through you to take the people down a road no Israelite is meant to travel.

Ahab, Baal may look like a more “exciting’ god than the God of the Exodus,

But this excitement is surface only – it’s all smoke and mirrors Ahab

It’s all about the immediate and the sensual.

So, Ahab I am here because God has sent me to tell you that owing to your faithlessness to the true and only God,

You and that piece of work wife of yours are responsible for “no more rain”

Read my lips Ahab – there will be no more rain until you turn back and the people turn back to worshipping the one and only true God.

What God through Elijah speaks unfolds with all the nasty side effects of drought.

The sun rises and descends through a cloudless sky day after day

In a subsequent confrontation between the prophets of Baal and Elijah there unfolds a sound and light show with no parallel in scripture.

Big victory for God!

Elijah who should feel at the top of his game is sent into an emotional tail spin by threats from Jezebel – NOT King Ahab

This is one nasty lady – though even “lady” might be stretching the truth...

Drawn into the wilderness, Elijah has his whine and pity party

It’s though a time of re-assessment and rest.

By God’s words and presence in the still small voice, Elijah is reminded that he is not alone.

God still has work for Elijah to do.

It's not over until I say it's over Elijah

This morning's lesson picks up Elijah's story
sometime later.

The place – Jezreel

The location – Ahab's summer palace

The conflict – Ahab wants an adjacent to the palace
piece of property – a vineyard that is presently
owned by one Naboth

Not for the wine – but so Ahab can plant vegetables
Shades of the leeks and garlic the children of Israel
longed for as they marched out of Egypt...perhaps

As a faithful Israelite though Naboth takes
very seriously the sacredness of the land as outlined
in Leviticus

I cannot sell, part with, barter or give you this
land O King – at any price

This is the place of my ancestors – this must be my
way King Ahab

Shift focus to Ahab's bed chamber

The text tells us Ahab went **home resentful and
sullen.**

Let's pause here and wonder.

I wonder as Ahab lay on his bed or slouched in a
chair what he was thinking – as he gazed off into
the middle distance

I wonder how greatly he was peeved at being told
by an Israelite – and a rural Israelite at that

Can you hear him murmuring to himself – “I just hate it, hate it, hate it, HATE IT when I do not get my own way.”

Who does this hayseed Naboth think he is talking to – another hayseed like himself

I am the king....

I thought being king means that I get what I want

The kings in Jezebel’s country certainly get everything they want!

They do not give a flying fig about hurt feelings or upsetting people!

Why should I be different from them?

Who does this bumpkin think he is?

What is all this talk about family?

I drink wines older than his family line

I need to get my act together!

Everyone has a price

Naboth is just trying to take advantage of my open heartedness and my good disposition

Well...I will show them that no one treats the king this way – I know – I WON’T EAT.

That’s what I will do

I will waste away to nothing until I am the size of a dried up old grape

Then they will be sorry!!!

They will not have old Ahab to kick around anymore!!!

I believe, without interference, in time Ahab might have realized the error of even making such a request of Naboth

Of course as a faithful Israelite, Naboth WOULD NEVER sell his vineyard

I was wrong

I will find another location for my vegetables!

Sadly for all the principals interference takes the form of Jezebel.

Again, I read verses 5-7 in a much more menacing and nasty context

I wonder if by this point, Jezebel has had it with this God of the Israelites

And his little mouthpiece – Elijah

I wonder if by this point she is now stridently seeking to undermine in any way she can this God who sets limits,

Says no even to kings and is always watching over Israel.

This God who is NOT always on the side of worldly leaders and power brokers

I wonder therefore whether the meeting of Ahab and Jezebel went something like this

She strolls into the bed chamber and sees Ahab in deep distress.

He whines out the story.

Ahab – did I marry a king or a cockroach

It's one thing to bend and scrape to me and my wishes – after all I am your wife!

BUT you are letting this country bumpkin get the better of you

This is bad for your reputation and certainly mine as your wife

Fast...that is your solution to the problem

Not eat....Grow up Ahab

Do I have to do everything!!!!

There and then she determines she is going to make Naboth an offer he cannot refuse.

I'll get your precious vineyard Ahab – you just watch....

This is of course precisely what Jezebel does – but in a nasty and conspiratorial way!

With Naboth's death, his lands revert to the crown!

They become by default – Ahab's property

I wonder, if Ahab ever asked or sought out what happened to Naboth

Did he buy the line – he's gone away

Don't trouble yourself with such details

Just know the vineyard is yours King Ahab

Know that it was a real steal!!!!

Nasty story isn't it?

A story of injustice, corruption in high places and a horrendous abuse of power

It is a story that continues to be played out and repeated even today, only the names and circumstances change.

The observation of a long dead British Prime minister, William Pitt holds and resonates today – and not only in the realm of politics and government.

In speaking to the House of Lords in 1770,
*Unlimited power is apt to corrupt the minds of
those who possess it.*

What sobering reminders for the here and now can we draw from this Biblical story of injustice and the exercise of worldly power without restraint or accountability?

I wish I could say differently.

I wish I could say bullying and lording it over others was something we as human beings grew out of.

--but the sort of injustice and unfettered worldly power is still too much with us

In fact,

I believe bullying and lording it over others is much worse than it was when I was growing up

The social media and a generation's addiction to it has contributed to its increase

Think I am exaggerating? – the social media savvy people believe it a great insult to be defriended on Facebook or any of the communication means.

There is also a lack of civility very much abroad in our world – that feeds bullying and lording it over others

I do not think the current US President is the root cause of the lack of civility,

But he does nothing to lessen uncivil behavior and language.

Rather, through his public speeches and tweets he spreads fear, chaos and eye rollies

And many say well if the President of the so called most powerful nation in the world can behave and act this way, what's to prevent me from doing the same?

We should not have to have very firm no nonsense anti-bullying policies in schools – but we do!

We should not have to have anti-bullying legislation in many provinces, but we do.

We should not have to have legislation and legal protection for workers to prevent companies from emptying pension plans for personal or other gain.

But the greed of higher ups in companies like Dofasco and Nortel have necessitated laws protecting pensions

A Me Too movement should not exist, but every week it seems some high powered seemingly

upright person is found to have feet of clay when it comes to sexual boundaries.

Such people have never been taught or adhered to wisdom once spoken by the Duke of Wellington during the Peninsular campaign of 1812-1814.

Gentlemen, keep your britches on....

The Duke had a plain talking way about him....

So, the injustices and corruption exists.

Following and adhering to the way of Jesus will not remove us from this imperfect world in which we each live!!

I believe a second sobering reminder from the story of Naboth's vineyard and this is *by way of warning*

Though we may be tempted – and even the most faithful can be tempted to follow the ways of the world in the matter of unfettered worldly power

There is a day of reckoning a comin'

And nasty people always get their comeuppance!!

Maybe not immediately, nor as quickly as we, if we are victims might wish – but hear me comeuppance will happen – for all and for each of us!

Witness Ahab and Jezebel.

Before Ahab could taste a single grape, standing before him is the unwanted intruder, his troubler – Elijah

And Elijah is not there to buy grapes!!

Elijah is there to simply announce – GOD HAS
HAD ENOUGH AHAB

Enough of your corruption,
Enough of Jezebel's manipulation

Ahab, your dynasty will end and end
violently.

Jezebel will die a horrible death

Ahab – your royal lineage will cease

Your legacy will be one of disgrace and shame!

In the matter of injustice and power abuses
we face, I believe we can take real hope and retain a
long view perspective.

How so?

Based on the promises of scripture and a fair
working knowledge of world history – even in the
worst chaos, confusion, injustice, imbalance,
Even blatant evil itself

--these things will not last forever

The Donny J types will not last forever.

The Doug Fords of Ontario with his decision to rip
the heart of Ontario social programmes and it seems
replace it with the availability of beer for a buck a
can – his leadership will not last forever!!!

Living in the midst of injustice and
corrupt absolute power is never easy

The temptation is to often just give in, just join the
crowd--if you can't beat them, join them.

After all, what can one person, little old me do?

You can continue to live a life of consistent and in
 God's strength way of Jesus,
 Practicing every day grace, forgiveness, generosity,
 understanding and hope
 As to one person, let me remind you of just one
 person influencing great events for the good.

Of course there is Naboth – he died standing
 on the promises of God, but it is his death that
 prompts God through Elijah to proclaim ENOUGH.

I think of Hungarian Reformed pastor Laszlo
 Tokes speaking out in Timisoara about the brutal
 policies of Romania's communist autocrat Nichoi
 Ceausescu in mid December 1989.

You remember that by the end of the calendar year,
 Ceausescu and his wife had been executed and their
 brutal reign of terror was over.

In his time in the desert, God reminded Elijah that
 there were many who had not bowed their knee to
 Baal.

By God's grace and in his strength, there are
 still many who have not bowed their knee to Baal –
 a god of sensuality, smoke and mirrors
 A god of self and worldiness today!

There are many who still affirm daily – Jesus
 is Lord

There are many today who still affirm the last
 words of the Old Testament wisdom writer
 Ecclesiastes,

**The end of the matter; all has been heard.
Fear God, and keep his commandments; for
that is the whole duty of everyone. (Eccles.
12:13)**

In essence, --love God and love other people.

The question is then:

Which way shall we choose to follow?

The way of a self-absorbed, self centred,
life like Ahab and Jezebel

Or,

A life centred on grace, respect, God's love,
Mercy, grace and forgiveness

A life that says the sacred and the holy are all about
us – if we but open our eyes

Always the question is:

**How long will you go limping with two different
opinions? If the Lord is God, then follow
him; but if Baal, then follow him (I Kings
18:21)**

However much the Voices of the world would wish
to convince us otherwise,

The Lord God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob the
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is still the Lord.

So the question is still in play

Which way shall we choose to follow?

Choose wisely!