

**Not Your Ordinary Feast**  
**A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church**  
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**1 Samuel 25:1-35**  
**9-9-2018**

Saul was still king of Israel. He wouldn't be for too much longer. David would soon replace him. But not before their armies engaged in several years of aggressive posturing, and the occasional battle.

During this time, David and his army were encamped in Carmel. And while there, his armies offered protection for the local shepherds. But an army can only stay encamped for so long before it needs supplies and some form of hospitality.

Word gets out that Nabal, a wealthy vassal, is shearing his sheep, and he's gonna hold a feast to celebrate. David and his men, tired from army rations, send an envoy to see if Nabal might be willing to spare a Boston Butt or two, and maybe a quarter keg of Bud Light – they have, after all, been good to Nabal and his shepherds. They have kept them safe and caused them no harm. And hey, it's a party, can you throw us an invite, neighbor?

David expects a generous welcome. He shouldn't have.

Nabal is less than generous. In fact, before the story even begins, the text tells us he is surly and mean. We're also told he's really, really rich – he's got three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. That's a lot of mutton, y'all!!!

And Nabal says to David's men, "I don't know you. I'm having this party for the people who have worked to benefit me. And if I let the lot of you in, there are other masters' servants who will want me to invite them, too. No thanks. I owe you nothing. Now scram."

And when I read about Nabal, this image comes over me. Bright, orange spray tan; an enormous comb-over; towers of Gold with big letters at the top that read: N-A-B-A-L. And I'm guessing that his shepherds don't make more than the minimum wage; And I'm guessing that he only likes to entertain people who look and sound just like him; And I'm guessing that his is a tribal nature; And I'm guessing that there are a whole lot of people in Nabal's life, who have to spend a whole lot of time cleaning up the messes he makes – messes made because of a lack of empathy and decency and generosity.

And I see another image. I see the feast finished. There are half-empty goblets, and hams untouched, and a mountain of excess, all wasted, because Nabal thought that it was all better hoarded and unused, rather than shared and depleted.

When David's envoy informs him of Nabal's inhospitable rejection, David's anger boils over. And we don't see the lovey-dovey David of First and Second Chronicles. We see him flaws and all. He straps his sword to his thigh, saddles up his horses, and instructs his men to get ready for a bloodbath. "We're gonna wipe this guy out. We're gonna murder every one of Nabal's male relatives – Stark-wedding style – and they'll be nothing left of his name."

And at this point, can I just say, “Wow, there is WAY too much testosterone in this room, y’all!” We’ve got one man who wants to hoard everything in sight. And we’ve got another who wants to exact justice on this greed with swift, sweeping, and total annihilation.

Thank God for faithful, patient, resilient women!!! Did I mention patient?

The text tells us that Nabal is married to Abigail, who is both beautiful and clever. And several of the shepherds of Nabal alert Abigail to this urgent situation. Her husband has deeply offended David, and his brash action will have devastating consequences for many innocent people.

Remember how earlier I said when I imagined Nabal, I imagined all of these people bailing him out of messes. I wonder how many untold messes Abigail saved him from?

Abigail devises a plan. She waits for Nabal to get plenty of amber and mutton on his belly, and to be fully into party mode. And then she sneaks into the kitchen, whereupon she prepares the finest home-cooked meal. It’s all homemade, and even if some of it was store-bought, it’s not generic, she’s using the good stuff: Meats, cheeses, breads, fruits, spirits – it’s all there. And at dawn, she loads it all up, and delivers it to David and his men.

She says, “I beg your pardon, my Lord. My fault. I am so sorry. I wasn’t there when my husband treated your men poorly, and Lord knows, I would’ve righted it immediately. But since I didn’t, I’m here now, and please accept this feast on our family’s behalf. There’s no need for bloodshed today. And besides, you are about to become king. And do you really want to deal with the after-effects of mass genocide for the entirety of your reign? It’s really not politically expedient. Sit down and have some cornbread and some sweet tea. I made it myself!”

Abigail is a charmer. And David is a predictable man. And his hangri-ness is cured by Abigail’s gift. And because of Abigail’s generosity, David does not harm Nabal’s house.

When it’s all over, Abigail heads back home. And once Nabal wakes up, and I imagine he’s got quite the hangover, Abigail says, “Hey, I love you so much. Here’s how much. I wanted to do something nice for our neighbors in your honor. So I threw David and his men a party, and I mean a big party. And I spared no expense. But it was all worth it just to see the look on your face. Awww, what a smile you have!!!”

Nabal is so shocked, and so furious at this disclosure, that he has a heart attack – his heart turns to stone. And ten days later, he’s dead.

And King David, still charmed by Abigail, eventually marries the woman who spared him all that drama.

So what’s this story about? What kind of covenant does it support? And how does it speak to us today?

Well, just like Joshua, and Ruth, and Hannah, Abigail’s is a story with some good things, and with a few we’d like to forget.

Last week, we talked about the idea of disruption. God’s covenant creates people who disrupt systems of injustice – that is, God’s covenant helps Israel become dissatisfied with the status quo protected by persons of privilege.

In today's case, Abigail disrupts a cycle of violence. Had Abigail not acted quickly, assertively, and with creativity, her entire village would have been dismantled. I'm glad that we have saints like Abigail, who are willing to try something new to protect the ones they love.

And here's an instance, where despite the intentions of misguided leaders, people of integrity ensure the protection of their community. What I wonder, would have happened if Abigail's response to this crisis would have been to pen an anonymous editorial lamenting her husband's inability to play in the sandbox? I dare say she wouldn't have had a village, let alone a husband, left to lament.

But just like the other stories in our series, all of the remedies occur on such a micro-level. David's anger has been averted. Temporarily. His violence isn't physical on this day, but his physical violence won't cease as he secures his new kingdom. And while David doesn't strike out at Nabal, he does pray that God will exact just vengeance. And David celebrates Nabal's untimely death as God re-directing Nabal's evil-doing correctly: upon Nabal's head.

Abigail will become David's wife. A good thing...I guess. Abigail presents herself to David, bowing and kneeling, calling herself a "slave to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." Is Abigail trading the whims of a greedy husband for those of a war hawk? And in this statement, is she steeling herself to have to fix David's messes, too? Not to mention that David also takes another wife, Ahinoam of Jezreel, in the paragraph after David marries her. Not exactly the most equitable way to start a partnership.

Of our four stories in the series, this is the hardest to reconcile. I have more trouble telling you, "This is a good story!" Though I will tell you I have great admiration for Abigail.

If you want today's story to paint an ideal portrait of the world, it's probably not the one for you. There's violence. And disturbing power dynamics. And women, again, are treated as possessions. And God's validation is doled out in dangerous ways.

Despite these flaws, Abigail is strong, and clever, and creative, and worthy of our praise. She will disrupt this system in as assertive a way as she can. Because she knows that a perpetual cycle of violence doesn't square with the concept of God's shalom.

And if we're honest with ourselves, we can see many of these characters in our own lives, even in our own actions. Maybe not with the same degree of hyperbole, but we're still in there somewhere.

Like Nabal, do we need to win, or have more, or store up our resources, just because? And do we ever feel like: "I earned it, and I'm not giving it to you. No way. No how?"

And like David, do we want a quick solution: justice served cold? Is it easier to just right a wrong with another wrong? Is it easier to just punch back, or to say something nasty, or to so utterly dominate someone, that they'll think twice about messing with us again?

And like Abigail, do we ever find ourselves stuck in the middle? Trying to make sense of a world that tells us the options are fight or flight. Or that tells us, "Sorry, pal, that's just the way it is. So play the game."

I think God empowers people like Abigail to disrupt a rigid world. And I think, when we live as covenant people, really live as covenant people, we develop brains and hearts and guts and souls that tell us, "It doesn't have to be this way."

And so this morning, I imagine a thousand Abigails (999 don't have their own story in First Samuel), all choosing to do as she did. To break that cycle with the tools they have available.

And this morning, I also imagine you, this congregation, all thinking about the world you live in. Maybe you want to end poverty, or hunger, or violence, or dangerous -isms. Or maybe you just want to see your communities exhibit tangible demonstrations of love and empathy for their neighbors. And I see you at work, and at home, and out-and-about, choosing moments, some small, some bigger, to disrupt the endless cycle.

Your individual actions happen on a micro level. And they'll have a micro effect. But your actions are in tandem with a covenant people. And eventually, these collective actions will make a difference.

Ruth, and Hannah, and Abigail – each made their world a little better for the next. Change was slow. But I am reminded of another faithful woman, Mary, who was steeped in the faithful witness of these women, and who in Luke rejoices:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior, for She has looked with favor on the lowliness of Her servant. Surely, from now on, all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy, holy, holy is Her name!!!

Sardis Baptist Church, prepare a feast. Pack up your mule. Spread generosity to your enemy. Disrupt a system that needs to be disrupted. I feel certain that Abigail would approve.

Amen.