

Waiting in the Advent season is not a passive verb; it's an active one. To wait on the forthcoming peace of God's presence among us (not to mention God's hope, joy, and love) is not to sit around in our pajamas until the visitor pulls in the driveway. To wait for such things is more akin to serving. Advent waiters keep watch like sentinels; make ready like nesting mothers; and offer attentiveness and hospitality like banquet servers. Advent waiters prepare themselves to fully experience their expectations. Advent waiters also realize that they must use their gifts in the present to help ensure a fruitful future. Advent waiters also find ways to ensure that the entire community partakes in the coming fruitfulness.

While Abigail waits, she serves. Thanks be to God!

Blink, and you might miss her story. Like so many other remarkable, hardworking, creative, faithful women, Abigail's story is revealed in minor scenes and footnotes. But if we take time to read the footnotes, and explore the hidden spaces of minor sequences, we will be rewarded richly. And we'll discover that Abigail is anything but a footnote!

Abigail is decisive. Upon learning that Nabal has spurned and offended King David, Abigail leaps into action. She devises a plan to offer hospitality, and executes her plan flawlessly. We all just finished our own Thanksgiving feasts, and even with planning and preparation, and even for one or two households, such feasting takes lots of coordination. Can you imagine how difficult it would have been to prepare a meal for an entire army on short notice? Not to mention, this is a hangry and cranky army, so whatever is offered up needs to be excellent! Abigail delivers!

Abigail is selfless. She puts the needs of others above her own welfare. One has to wonder how many times her selfish husband jeopardized the safety of his people by being an inhospitable host? How many individual relationships did Abigail have to repair on Nabal's behalf? And living in the household of someone so volatile, how many times was she the recipient of his venomous rage? Make no mistake, Abigail was exposing herself to the wrath of her husband by defying his will. And when he awoke from his stupor, there would be consequences for her actions.

Abigail is willing to risk such consequences in order to spare her people a greater wrath.

Abigail is brave and diplomatic. She knows just what to say. We know from scripture that David, while devoted to God, also had a temper. Abigail is willing to approach him, and offer a sign of peace and hospitality that will sooth his anger. She's forced to uphold David's honor while not sacrificing the honor of her husband. And to be honest, I wouldn't blame her for washing her hands of all this machismo. But she doesn't. She remains humble. She offers hospitality. She sets a table to ensure grace and peace. Maybe I'm spinning a yarn, but if David really did pen the 23rd Psalm, perhaps it's Abigail we can thank for the image of a God who prepares a table in the presence of one's enemies!

In Abigail, we meet a person who blends confidence and humility. She is confident in the gifts God has given her. She is humble enough to use her gifts in such a way as to offer collective rather than individual benefit. She doesn't seek to assure peace for herself by staying passive. Instead, she seeks to assure peace for her household by being proactive.

When I think about Abigail, I think about how I want our congregation to be. At the end of the day, what we really are is a table – yes, one that offers food, but one that's also a collection of resources. And at the end of the day, we have to decide if we are going to share or hoard our resources.

Abigail, even at risk to her own wellbeing, determined to share her household's resources in order that all might experience peace – both her neighbors and her enemies.

And so I wonder, in this, the season of Advent, as we wait for peace, how might our table mimic Abigail's? We might not have an obstacle as big, or as greedy, or as violent as Nabal in our midst, but we most certainly face pushback in the sharing of our resources, and in the radical welcome of our table. And the question is, are we will willing to chance our status quo in a vibrant but bubbled-off household for the reward of a more vibrant world, one where both neighbor and enemy might live in peace together?

Serving While We Wait
Bob Stillerman
Second Sunday of Advent, 12/6/2020
1 Samuel 25:1-35 (Abigail)



a spiritually
progressive
community
of faith

Friends, while we wait, may we serve like Abigail. And may dare to dream a peace as big as hers!

Amen.