

SERMON FOR JUNE 16, 2013

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i UCC
Father's Day/4th Sunday after Pentecost

7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services

Scripture: **1 Kings 21:1-21a (Focus); Luke 7:36-8:3**

Message: **"GOD's Ways Trump Always!"**



Gathering in the Word

Happy Father's Day!! Credit for starting Father's Day goes to a woman named Sonora Smart Dodd by asking her pastor to honor Fathers like Mother's Day. It took a while to catch on around the country. Several Presidents tried but only in 1957 Maine Senator Margaret Chase Smith asked that Congress establish Father's Day. But in 1966 President Lyndon Johnson issued the first presidential proclamation honoring fathers—designating the 3rd Sunday in the month of June as Father's Day. Six years later in 1972—President Richard Nixon signed into law and made Father's Day a permanent national holiday!

GOD's passion and zeal for justice is a powerful thing! When we try to manage things our own way, to suit our own purposes—things can go badly and terribly wrong.

Hearing the Word

1 Kings 21:1-21a (The Voice Bible)

21 ¹After all this took place, Ahab, the king of Samaria, ²made a request to Naboth, the Jezreelite, who owned a vineyard in Jezreel right next to Ahab's palace.

Ahab: Your vineyard is near my house. *Why don't you* hand it over to me so I can make a vegetable garden out of it? I will trade you a better vineyard for it, or I can pay you, if you prefer.

Naboth: ³*I'm sorry, the Eternal forbids that I give away any of my ancestors' inheritance, even to you.*

⁴ Ahab frustrated and upset by Naboth's reply went back into his house. Naboth the Jezreelite had replied, "I will

not hand over my ancestors' inheritance to you." Ahab went to bed that night without eating anything. ⁵ Jezebel, his wife, noticed this.

Jezebel: What is wrong with you? Why are you not eating anything? *This isn't like you.*

Ahab: ⁶ I made a request to Naboth the Jezreelite: "Hand over your vineyard to me, and I will pay you for it. Or I can trade you an *even better* vineyard for it." But he said, "I will not hand over my vineyard to you. *The Lord forbids it.*"

Jezebel: ⁷ Are you not the king of all Israel? *You can have anything you want.* Get up, and eat some bread. Let your heart be glad, for I will get Naboth the Jezreelite's vineyard for you.

⁸ Jezebel composed letters, *signed them* with Ahab's name, and pressed his seal on them. She sent all these letters to the leaders and noblemen who lived in the city with Naboth.

Jezebel's Letters: ⁹ Declare a time of fasting *for all the people*. Put Naboth before all the people, ¹⁰ and have two worthless men *with questionable morals* sit before him. Instruct these two base men to give testimony against Naboth by saying, "You, *Naboth*, blasphemed both God and the king." *After this testimony has been given*, take Naboth outside and kill him with stones.

¹¹ The leaders and noblemen of the city did just as Jezebel instructed them in the letters. ¹² They declared a time of fasting *for all the people* and they seated Naboth before all the people. ¹³ The two worthless men sat in

front of Naboth and bore witness against him by saying, "Naboth blasphemed both God and the king." Then they brought him outside and killed him with stones.

Two Men (to Jezebel): ¹⁴ Naboth has been executed by stoning.

Jezebel (hearing the news): ¹⁵ Get up, Ahab. Go and take Naboth the Jezreelite's vineyard as your own—the one he would not give you for money. *It is now yours for the taking*, for Naboth is now dead.

¹⁶ When Ahab learned Naboth was no longer alive, Ahab got up and made his way down to Naboth the Jezreelite's vineyard to take it as his own.

Ahab's willingness to sell himself cheaply for things outside of God's will strike again. But this time, the true source of Ahab's wickedness is revealed. God knows that it is Jezebel, Ahab's foreign wife, who is the root of the evil. Intending to regain Ahab's devotion once and for all, God sends Elijah with His message instead of an unknown prophet. Although God's mission is successful, Elijah is left with a powerful enemy.

¹⁷ Meanwhile, the word of the Eternal One visited Elijah the Tishbite.

Eternal One: ¹⁸ Get up, and go find Ahab (Israel's king) in Samaria. *Naboth has been killed because of the work of Jezebel.* Right now, Ahab is in Naboth's vineyard, claiming it as his own. ¹⁹ Tell him, "This is the message of the Eternal One: 'Are you a murderer and a thief?'" Tell him, "This is the message of the Eternal One: '*Beware.*'"

The dogs will slurp up your blood in the very spot where they licked up Naboth's blood.'"

Ahab (*replying to Elijah*): ²⁰ Have you discovered what I have done, my enemy?

Elijah: I have only discovered what you have done because you have sold your soul to wickedness in the Eternal's eyes. ²¹ *He says, "I will send evil against you and blow you away. I will also separate you from every man in Israel—both free and enslaved. You will be all alone.*

1 Kings 21 is an upsetting and terrible story to teach us something about GOD, about ourselves, and about GOD's plan for GOD's creation! We all heard the story from THE VOICE BIBLE:

- ✓ Ahab, King of Samaria is bored since he gave his wife Jezebel control over the official duties of the King.
- ✓ So the King has lots of idle time on his hands. He wants to do some gardening. Looking out from his window Ahab sees this neighboring vineyard—the perfect place for him to have his garden.
- ✓ The vineyard belongs to **Naboth of Jezreel**; so the King goes to talk story with Naboth and offers a sweet deal. So Ahab makes an offer Naboth can't refuse—he'll give Naboth any vineyard in the kingdom and he can name his price; or Ahab will give cash on the barrel and Naboth can name his price. Naboth can retire, buy a villa overlooking the Mediterranean and spend the rest of his life in ease with his wife! Do we have a deal?
- ✓ Naboth said that "Yahweh GOD forbids that that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers." Naboth invokes the sacred name of Yahweh GOD. Naboth knew that the land of

Israel doesn't belong to any person—it belongs to Yahweh GOD! The Israelites were tenants on GOD's land.

- ✓ If Naboth had taken Ahab's offer, there would be no inheritance for his children and grandchildren. So Naboth refused the offer!
- ✓ Ahab goes back to the palace like a petulant bad-tempered child. His wife Jezebel finds out what's going and calls him names—and decides to take care of Naboth. She gets Naboth stoned to death based on some flimsy charges.
- ✓ The only person, Naboth, in this story who has genuine piety before GOD is killed and murdered!

So GOD sends Elijah (*whose name means: My GOD is Yahweh*) **the Prophet** and pays Ahab a visit on the same day that Ahab is strolling through his "new gardens."

- ✓ Ahab is feeling good so he greets Elijah nicely!
- ✓ Elijah says that Ahab and Jezebel are dog food and GOD is going to punish them for what they did to Naboth.
- ✓ Ahab is frightened just enough to be offer repentance so GOD delays punishment. But both Ahab & Jezebel will suffer for their wanton and reckless wrecking of SHALOM. Nothing less than SHALOM is at the heart of this story!
- ✓ **SHALOM is more than peace as we define it. SHALOM is not just simply "no conflict or fights," in fact, conflict is just the ground floor of SHALOM! SHALOM involves a vast networking and mutual edifying relationships.**
- ✓ **SHALOM happens when every person and every creature takes care to build up every other person and creature!**

SHALOM recognizes that GOD created this universe as a UNITY!

- ✓ Therefore—everything is ultimately connected to everything else!
- ✓ We all affect each other around us for good or for bad!

- ✓ We either enhance the life of our neighbors or we detract and take away from it!

So the key for each and all of us is to keep SHALOM before us is to keep the reality of other people before us!

- ✓ GOD never loses sight of each of us!
- ✓ GOD always has our names and our neighbor's names on his lips!

On to Luke 7:

Luke 7:36-8:3 (The VOICE Bible)

³⁶⁻⁴⁰ Once a Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to be a guest for a meal.

Picture this: Just as Jesus enters the man's home and takes His place at the table, a woman from the city— notorious as a woman of ill repute—follows Him in. She has heard that Jesus will be at the Pharisee's home, so she comes in and approaches Him, carrying an alabaster flask of perfumed oil. Then she begins to cry, she kneels down so her tears fall on Jesus' feet, and she starts wiping His feet with her own hair. Then she actually kisses His feet, and she pours the perfumed oil on them.

Simon (*thinking*): *Now I know this guy is a fraud. If He were a real prophet, He would have known this woman is a sinner and He would never let her get near Him, much less touch Him . . . or kiss Him!*

Jesus (*knowing what the Pharisee is thinking*): Simon, I want to tell you a story.

Simon: Tell me, Teacher.

Jesus: ⁴¹ Two men owed a certain lender a lot of money. One owed 100 weeks' wages, and the other owed 10 weeks' wages. ⁴² Both men defaulted on their loans, but the lender forgave them both. Here's a question for you: which man will love the lender more?

Simon: ⁴³ Well, I guess it would be the one who was forgiven more.

Jesus: Good answer.

⁴⁴⁻⁴⁶ Now Jesus turns around so He's facing the woman, although He's still speaking to Simon.

Jesus: Do you see this woman here? *It's kind of funny.* I entered your home, and you didn't provide a basin of water so I could wash the road dust from my feet. You didn't give me a customary kiss of greeting and welcome. You didn't offer me the common courtesy of providing oil to brighten my face. But this woman has wet my feet with her own tears and washed them with her own hair. She hasn't stopped kissing my feet since I came in. And she has applied perfumed oil to my feet. ⁴⁷ This woman has been forgiven much, and she is showing much love. But the person who has shown little love shows how little forgiveness he has received.

⁴⁸ (to the woman) your sins are forgiven.

Simon and Friends (*muttering among themselves*):

⁴⁹ Who does this guy think He is? He has the audacity to claim the authority to forgive sins?

Jesus (*to the woman*): ⁵⁰ Your faith has liberated you. Go in peace.

8 Soon after this incident, Jesus preached from city to city, village to village, carrying the good news of the kingdom of God. He was accompanied by a group called “the twelve,”² and also by a larger group including some women who had been rescued from evil spirits and healed of diseases. There was Mary, called Magdalene, who had been released from seven demons.³ There were others like Susanna and Joanna, who was married to Chuza, a steward of King Herod. And there were many others too. *These women played an important role in Jesus’ ministry*, using their wealth to provide for Him and His other companions.

The Kingdom and Realm of GOD will have the greatest appeal to and the mightiest impact on those who know they need grace the mercy the most!

Surely Simon the Pharisee felt no need to anything in the way of forgiveness. Simon made his own way in life. Simon probably knew that Jesus attracted the lowlifes, the bad and the disreputable people around. We’re not sure then why Jesus is invited to Simon’s house—Simon being and socially high up and part of the very religious establishment that was opposing Jesus! Apparently Houses then seem to have been open for these kind of intrusions—people coming and going! When Jesus got there he was treated so shabbily and disrespectful by Simon.

So how did the woman in our story get in? Everyone there knew of this woman. Maybe she was planted there to see how Jesus would react?

Jesus reacts to her true to his graciousness and forgives the woman, welcomes her repentance and absorbs her lifetime of pain!

- ✓ Jesus is so full of the Gospel that it's impossible for Jesus to become unclean on account of coming into contact with people who are unclean!
- ✓ With Jesus it always went the other way as Jesus' holiness "infected" the other person—cleaning them up once and for all—right then and there!
- ✓ The woman had been forgiven so much to be grateful and therefore more likely to be full of aloha than those who need little forgiveness in the first place!
- ✓ Then Jesus turns and looks directly at the woman (v. 44ff) and utters the words, "Your sins are forgiven."
- ✓ This woman has shown such a great love—and her great love proving that her many sins had been forgiven!
- ✓ Then 8:1-3; Jesus' entourage was getting support by some generous and loving women!

Doing the Word

So what is the Word of God for us this morning?

1. ONE: WE ARE ALL STANDING IN THE NEED OF GOD'S GRACE!

- ✓ All of us have left a trail of tears—even small tears of children and innocents—calls for repentance—recognizing the wrong of the past and changing our ways or habits towards Jesus' aloha!
- ✓ All of us have been wounded and closed our hearts to GOD's higher possibilities.
- ✓ All of us need GOD's reconciling touch to begin again and again.

- ✓ GOD's grace does abound and is plentiful—but in the midst of our lives we need to strive towards **confession, repentance, holiness, and care!**
- ✓ When we do and live this—we open ourselves to joyful interdependence and loving responsibility for each other, our neighborhoods and the world around us!

2. TWO: FORGIVENESS IS IMPORTANT FOR US, OUR FAMILIES, OUR CHURCH AND ALL OUR RELATIONSHIPS!

Forgiveness is close tied to the idea of “release” and “letting go.” Jesus releases the woman from being stuck to the category of “*sinner*” that the Pharisees and others had labeled her as. So when Jesus says that this woman had “loved” much—Jesus uses the loaded Greek word “**agape**” (*the kind of love that is and of GOD*). Jesus uses agape/love for the woman!

- ✓ We Christian of all ages and languages, sizes, men and women—are to **widen** the circle of grace to embrace outsiders and sinners—even among and around us!
- ✓ Forgiving each other is the heart of the restoration of relationships around us!
- ✓ Forgiveness releases any claim on someone else for some past injury or hurt or something bad that was done to us!
- ✓ Forgiveness gives you back yourself! You see—after awhile—being indebted, owing others, knowing yourself first and foremost as a sinner—these realities come to dominate you.

3. THREE: WHEN YOU ARE FORGIVEN—ALL THOSE LIMITATIONS DISAPPEAR AND YOU ARE RESTORED, RENEWED, AND SET FREE!

- ✓ Yes, forgiveness is everything!

- ✓ Jesus in our Luke 7 lesson points out that it's not only that one who has been forgiven much—who loves much from gratitude—it's that the one who is forgiven little—loves little!
- ✓ **Yet Jesus says—those who have been forgiven little—love very little.**
- ✓ The joyful truth that those who recognize their need receive their heart's desire and live out of gratitude and aloha; the tragic truth that those who believe themselves righteous or sufficient on their own never know the joy of receiving and so pursue truncated and shortened lives—without genuine gratitude and aloha!

Sent in the Word

So we have these two stories from 1 Kings 21 and Luke 7 and 8. Ahab and Jezebel received punishment from GOD. In the story of the woman and Simon; to one, forgiveness is sheer blessing—something so beautiful and so important it breaks her heart and all she can do is to express her gratitude. Why? Because she knows she needs it! To Simon, the other character, it's pretty sure he doesn't need forgiveness.

- ✓ He is righteous!
- ✓ He obeys the law.
- ✓ He does what he should.

And so not only does he not need forgiveness (according to him) but the very mention of forgiveness is threatening and offensive.

Jesus is the one who forgives sin!
Jesus is the one who forgives sin!
Jesus comes to forgive sin!

That's why we know and need to know Jesus!
Blessings in your week ahead and Happy Father's Day!