

## June 12, 2016 Scripture and Sermon

### 1 Kings 21:1-10, (11-14),15-21a

Later the following events took place: Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of King Ahab of Samaria. And Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, so that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house; I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money." But Naboth said to Ahab, "The Lord forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance." Ahab went home resentful and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him; for he had said, "I will not give you my ancestral inheritance." He lay down on his bed, turned away his face, and would not eat.

His wife Jezebel came to him and said, "Why are you so depressed that you will not eat?" He said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard for it'; but he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" His wife Jezebel said to him, "Do you now govern Israel? Get up, eat some food, and be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal; she sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who lived with Naboth in his city. She wrote in the letters, "Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth at the head of the assembly; seat two scoundrels opposite him, and have them bring a charge against him, saying, 'You have cursed God and the king.' Then take him out, and stone him to death." The men of his city, the elders and the nobles

who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. Just as it was written in the letters that she had sent to them, they proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the assembly. The two scoundrels came in and sat opposite him; and the scoundrels brought a charge against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, "Naboth cursed God and the king." So they took him outside the city, and stoned him to death. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned; he is dead."

As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, "Go, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead." As soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab set out to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying: Go down to meet King Ahab of Israel, who rules in Samaria; he is now in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. You shall say to him, "Thus says the Lord: Have you killed, and also taken possession?" You shall say to him, "Thus says the Lord: In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, dogs will also lick up your blood."

Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" He answered, "I have found you. Because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord, I will bring disaster on you; I will consume you...."

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

### **Luke 7:36-8:3**

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him — that she is a sinner." Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "speak." "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning towards the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

Let us pray...Amen.

Both our Hebrew scripture and our gospel lesson this morning revolve around entitlement and gratitude. But before we can get down to the details, I'd like to explain a few things first, so that these stories will make sense to our modern ears.

The story from 1 Kings, of Ahab coveting Naboth's vineyard is an early example of what we in the modern world call 'eminent domain', where a government may take some or all of a property and claim that it is in the best interests of the community. Ahab was King, he wanted Naboth's vineyard so that he could have a really nice vegetable garden, and he went to Naboth to get him to trade it, or sell it.

But Naboth didn't want to trade it, or sell it, it was his ancestral property, handed down to him from generations. Naturally, he refused to trade or sell, and Ahab went home sulking. In fact, he had a mini temper tantrum, and went to bed, not eating.

Jezebel asked Ahab what was wrong, and he complained that Naboth wouldn't sell his property. So Jezebel asked, aren't you the one who rules Israel? You can do what you want! And she arranged to have Naboth killed, so that Ahab could possess the vineyard he had coveted.

Both Ahab and Jezebel felt that they were entitled to Naboth's property, and they had the power to make that happen.

Ahab wasn't grateful for what he already had, and he pined for property that wasn't his. His sense of entitlement along with Jezebel's sense of entitlement caused them to act improperly.

In our gospel lesson, a Pharisee, a wealthy and powerful member of the synagogue, hosted a dinner for Jesus. Now, it was an ancient custom that when wealthy and powerful members of that society hosted celebrities for dinner, members of the community were allowed to gather around to watch and listen.

They were not allowed to enter the house, or join at the table, or engage the guests, but they could listen to the conversation and watch whatever was going on during the dinner.

This is how someone like Mary Magdalene would be nearby.

Now, for some reason, the Pharisee felt entitled to ignore some of the most common hospitality customs of the day: having your guests feet washed, greeting them with a kiss, anointing them with oil upon their arrival. From his position of power and wealth, the Pharisee felt entitled to treat Jesus differently than customs would dictate.

And Mary took offense. She wept as she washed Jesus' feet, as she dried them with her hair, as she anointed his feet with oil, as she kissed his feet...Mary felt entitled to break the social customs of the day as well...but her sense of entitlement didn't come from a position of power and wealth, like Ahab's and the Pharisee's, hers came from a sense of justice and righteousness.

When the Pharisee felt entitled to call Mary a sinner, Jesus used this scenario to make a point: a person who has had their debt erased will be grateful, and the person who has had a larger debt forgiven will be more grateful.

I find this interesting. Because as I look around our 21<sup>st</sup> century world, I find the expression of gratitude to be in short supply. And I see that a sense of entitlement is prevalent in most areas of our lives.

Which is in fact the opposite of what I believe is the ideal ratio: more gratitude, less entitlement.

Advertising and marketing began in earnest in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, although there have been clever marketing tools ever since there have been items for sale. Even ancient salespeople had to have a gimmick, right?

But something has changed. Marketing today has evolved from examples of things we need, to things we want, to things we deserve. Early marketing simply showed us the things we needed to make our lives easier, or better. Then they showed us the things we wanted to make our lives easier, or better. Now we are bombarded with commercials and images that remind us of the things to which we are entitled, or deserve that will make our lives easier, or better.

New York State has a savings plan for college, and they want parents to use this savings plan so their children can get the education they deserve. Really? Education is something we deserve?

There's a law firm that advertises on TV, and their closing line is something like, let us help you get the settlement you deserve.

The more we think we are owed, the more we think we deserve, the less grateful we are. The more we exercise our power or our resources to get what we think we deserve, the less grateful we are for what we have.

But, when we act like Mary did, when we feel entitled to act on someone else's behalf, when we feel entitled to break a rule in the name of justice, then I think we are on solid ground.

So, part of being human is occasionally feeling like Ahab, or the Pharisee. Feeling entitled to act in a way that takes from others, or in a way that causes another pain. But the less we act on those impulses, the better off we'll be.

For most of us, rarely do we feel as Mary felt, so grateful for what we have been given, that we feel entitled to break customs or laws.

But the world would be a better place if we acted less like Ahab and the Pharisee, and more like Mary Magdalene, don't you think?

So the good news from today's Holy scripture is that when we practice gratitude over entitlement, we are making the world a better place. When we ignore the advertising about what we deserve, and focus on being grateful for what we have been given, we are making the world a better place.

Practicing entitlement is selfish. It hurts others. It puts us ahead of our neighbors, and it's contrary to what Jesus would have us do. Practicing gratitude hurts no one. In fact, when we are grateful for what we have, we resent others less; we become better neighbors.

We've all seen the 3 year old having a temper tantrum on the floor at Wegmans or Target or Walmart. "But I *want it!*" they scream. And the

parents that give it to them have just taught them that the louder they scream in public, the more likely they are to get stuff.

Our culture is overflowing with examples of how we feel we are entitled to certain things: we don't have to let that person onto the highway, we were here first We don't have to let that person go ahead in the checkout line, even if they only have 1 item, we were there first. We don't have to share our resources with those in need, we earned our pay. We don't have to feel compassion for those who have been forced out of their country because of violence and corruption, it's not our fault. We don't have to help that homeless person over there, it's their choice to be homeless.

Entitlement thinking leads to unkind behavior. Gratitude thinking leads to compassionate behavior. Which do you think Jesus would have us practice? You know which one. Let's go out and make that happen. Amen.





