



## **“Horticulture Leads to Death”**

Preaching Text: 1 Kings 21:1-21a  
16 June 2013: 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
FUMC, Arlington, Texas

“God will turn the hearts of fathers to their children  
and the hearts of children to their fathers” (Malachi 4:6).

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“I began to watch fathers, in the stores, in the playgrounds . . . I liked how they seemed to know what to do. They seemed like a dock, firmly attached to the world, you could be safe then, not always drifting . . .” (Bebe Campbell Moore).

Rhodes Logan (UM Foundation) adds:

Dads are a lot like docks. They are sturdy, firm, but able to give when they need to in order to not be tipped over by the waves. They too courageously jut out from the land, vulnerable, into the chaos of the ocean. They allow us to “walk on the water” across their backs, showing us the chaotic public spaces of life. Docks provide a place to rest, to make repairs, to load and unload your baggage. Just like dads.

The American Psychological Association suggests that fatherly love helps children develop a sense of their place in the world, which helps their social, emotional and cognitive development and functioning. Moreover, children who receive love from their fathers are less likely to struggle with behavioral or substance abuse problems.

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Hear the lesson for the day, 1 Kings 21:1-21a:

Later the following events took place: Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of King Ahab of Samaria. 2 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.” 3 But Naboth said to Ahab, “The LORD forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance.” 4 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.

5 His wife Jezebel came to him and said, “Why are you so depressed that you will not eat?” 6 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.’” 7 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.”

8 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. 9 She wrote in the letters, “Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth at the head of the assembly; 10 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."

11 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, 12 they proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the assembly. 13 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. 14 Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned; he is dead."

15 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." 16 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.

17 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying: 18 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. 19 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." 20 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, 21 I will bring disaster on you (1 Kg 21:1-21a).

Our lesson is a story about coveting, bearing false witness, killing, and stealing. Who is not interested in that? If it were not for coveting, bearing false witness, killing, and stealing could we imagine television as we know it today?

Our story begins painless enough with Israel's King Ahab seeing Naboth's vineyard adjacent to his palace and making a fair offer to purchase it to use for his garden. Ahab had a second home in Jezreel, a town about twenty miles from Samaria and Ahab decided that Naboth's vineyard would make an ideal place for a vegetable garden. Ahab even went so far as to offer to pay fair market value or even furnish another plot of land—an even better one—in return. What could be more reasonable than that? But Naboth was not interested and in effect swore an oath that he would never give up his land.

You might ask: "Why did Naboth refuse?" To begin with Naboth was not like Esau who sold his birthright for a bowl of chili (Genesis 25). Rather, Naboth refused because



of a distinctive relationship between the land, the Israelites, and Yahweh. Remember God's original covenant with Abraham promised three things: 1) a great nation, 2) the land, and 3) a blessed covenantal association with Yahweh. Naboth's ancestors provided him the vineyard as a trust from God. Naboth's land came not by way of some real estate deal; it was his as an ancestral inheritance from the Lord.

Because it came from God, the land was not to be taken from an Israelite or sold by an Israelite. It was to remain in the family, in the clan, in the tribe. Now there were provisions in the law that allowed an Israelite to lease his land if he was financially strapped, but such leases were always temporary. When the financial situation improved, one could redeem the property—and if it didn't improve, the property reverted in the year of Jubilee.

Because Naboth was not suffering from poverty and as he did not need to sell, he knew that he ought not to sell. And so he refused. He could have made a profitable deal but he thought covenantally rather than practically. After Naboth refuses Ahab's offer, the king pouts, but Jezebel devises a plot. She conspires with two "scoundrels" who charge Naboth with cursing God and the king. Later they put Naboth to death. Then the king gains Naboth's property.

Soon after Elijah arrives. God sends Elijah to prophesy to Ahab: his fate will be the same as Naboth's. Eventually we learn from 1 Kings 22:37 that a stray arrow kills Ahab, who dies from his wounds. The part about the dogs comes true. Listen to this odd little story that I hope makes a point:

A fellow had just been hired as the new CEO of a large high tech corporation. The retiring CEO met with him privately and presented him with three numbered envelopes. "Open these if you run up against a problem you don't think you can solve," he said.

Well, things went along pretty smoothly, but six months later, sales took a downturn and he was really catching a lot of heat. About at his wit's end, he remembered the envelopes. He went to his drawer and took out and opened the first envelope. The message read, "**Blame your predecessor.**"

The new CEO called a press conference and tactfully laid the blame at the feet of the previous CEO. Satisfied with his comments, the press—and Wall Street—responded positively, sales began to pick up and the problem was soon behind him.



About a year later, the company was again experiencing a slight dip in sales, combined with serious product problems. Having learned from his previous experience, the CEO quickly opened the second envelope. The message read, “**Reorganize.**” This he did, and the company quickly rebounded.

After several consecutive years of profitable quarters, the company once again fell on difficult times. The CEO went to his office, closed the door and opened the third envelope. The message said, “**Prepare three envelopes.**”

As human beings we only have so many battles in us. Naboth’s life was over a piece of land that represented a covenant with God. Too often our battles are over small and too regularly things of insignificance. In *Sports Illustrated*, Rick Telander, writes about this kind of tragic perspective:

In April 1989, 16-year-old Johnny Bates was shot to death in Houston by 17-year-old Demetrick Walker after Johnny refused to turn over his Air Jordan high-tops. In March, Demetrick was sentenced to life in prison. Said prosecutor Mark Vinson, “It’s bad when we create an image of luxury about athletic gear that it forces people to kill over it” (May 14, 1990).

When we think about conflicts we have with other people and how enmity creeps in—too often for no good reason—we might think about Naboth and the threshold of his willingness to refuse the king. We only have so many good fights in us. Perhaps we should pick them wisely.

An alert parishioner gave me an article from *The Atlantic Monthly* titled, “There’s More to Life Than Being Happy” by Emily E. Smith. Let me quote it as it refers to the difference between a happy life and meaningful life:

Leading a happy life, the psychologists found, is associated with being a “taker” while leading a meaningful life corresponds with being a “giver.”

Perhaps, Naboth sensed this as well.