

June 12

1 Kings 21:1-10, 15-

21 Now it happened sometime later that Naboth from Jezreel had a vineyard in Jezreel that was next to the palace of King Ahab of Samaria. 2 Ahab ordered Naboth, "Give me your vineyard so it can become my vegetable garden, because it is right next to my palace. In exchange for it, I'll give you an even better vineyard. Or if you prefer, I'll pay you the price in silver."

3 Naboth responded to Ahab, "Lord forbid that I give you my family inheritance!"

4 So Ahab went to his palace, irritated and upset at what Naboth[a] had said to him—because Naboth had said, "I won't give you my family inheritance!" Ahab lay down on his bed and turned his face away. He wouldn't eat anything.

5 His wife Jezebel came to him. "Why are you upset and not eating any food?" she asked.

6 He answered her, "I was talking to Naboth. I said, 'Sell me your vineyard. Or if you prefer, I'll give you another vineyard for it.' But he said, 'I won't give you my vineyard!'"

7 Then his wife Jezebel said to him, "Aren't you the one who rules Israel? Get up! Eat some food and cheer up. I'll get Naboth's vineyard for you myself." 8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, putting his seal on them. She sent them to the elders and officials who lived in the same town as Naboth. 9 This is what she wrote in the letters: "Announce a fast and place Naboth at the head of the people. 10 Then bring in two liars in front of him and have them testify as follows: 'You cursed God and king!' Then take Naboth outside and stone him so he dies."

15 As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, "Get up and take ownership of the vineyard of Naboth, which he had refused to sell to you. Naboth is no longer alive; he's dead." 16 When Ahab heard

that Naboth had died, he got up and went down to Naboth's vineyard to take ownership of it.

17 The Lord's word came to Elijah from Tishbe: 18 Get up and go down to meet Israel's King Ahab in Samaria. He is in Naboth's vineyard. He has gone down to take ownership of it. 19 Say the following to him: This is what the Lord says: So, you've murdered and are now taking ownership, are you? Then tell him: This is what the Lord says: In the same place where the dogs licked up Naboth's blood, they will lick up your own blood.

20 Ahab said to Elijah, "So you've found me, my old enemy!"

"I found you," Elijah said, "because you've enslaved yourself by doing evil in the Lord's eyes. 21 So I am now bringing evil on you! I will burn until you are consumed, and I will eliminate everyone who urinates on a wall that belongs to Ahab, whether slave or free.

How many people after hearing Yertle the Turtle today wondered why the turtles didn't just refuse to do what Yertle was asking them to do?

How many people here, after hearing this morning's scripture lesson, are wondering why Naboth didn't just trade his vineyard for the piece of land that King Ahab was offering? It sounded like a fair deal didn't it? It seemed fair because we are looking at this with our 21<sup>st</sup> century eyes, so to go forward, we need to look backward a little bit first.

The story is short and simple; at least it appears to be simple. Ahab lives in Samaria, his capital city but he is visiting his winter palace in Jezreel and it is here that he sees the vineyard of his next-door neighbor Naboth. Ahab who thinks that he owns all that he sees, wants to own that vineyard and his offer to buy the vineyard seems perfectly reasonable and fair. Unfortunately for him, Naboth doesn't live by the rule of the highest price, but by the law of the Most High God.

Will you pray with me please? May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen

What appears to us as a fair and reasonable offer is actually a very unfair request. Even though Ahab offers Naboth a reasonable price or a fair trade he has actually put him in a very difficult position. Naboth must either violate his family's identity and inheritance or refuse the king's request. According to Israelite tradition, the land belonging to Naboth is a possession of his family. It is this inheritance that makes up their identity; they belong to the land as much as the land belongs to them. The law in Leviticus 25:23



states that “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants” The Israelites understood that this meant it was forbidden to sell land because God is the real owner of the land, and the people who received it long before, after their liberation from slavery and their journey to the Promised Land hold it in trust, acting as stewards of God’s gifts not just to them but to their descendants after them. The land was not Naboth’s to give. Ahab’s request is not asking for a simple plot of land, he is asking Naboth to violate his ancestral religious obligation. Naboth says no because he remembers what Ahab is trying to forget.

This violation is even worse because of Ahab’s plan to turn the vineyard into a vegetable garden near his palace. I know what your’ thinking...what can be so bad about a vegetable garden? For Naboth and the Israelites, vegetables gardens are a sign of oppression. Deut. 11:10 contrasts the vegetable gardens of Egypt, the site of Israel’s oppression and slavery with the Promised Land. Vineyards on the other hand take years to grow and they require constant tending, they are the symbol of the land promised to them by God. Israel itself is often portrayed as a vineyard that is constantly cared for by the Lord and not to be traded for another people. Early listeners would have heard this story about a vineyard and a vegetable garden with a sense of shock, they understood that Ahab didn’t just want a vegetable garden; he wanted to transform God’s land into a land of bondage.

All of this symbolic stuff probably didn’t cross Ahab’s mind, his decision to procure the vineyard for his new vegetable garden was purely and totally self-centered. As a king he displayed an incredible mis-use of his authority, as an Israelite, he chooses to put his wishes over God’s word.



I can't help feeling sorry for Naboth...what a tough situation he had. Here he is facing his King, being offered a pretty sweet deal, and it would have been easy, it would have been really easy to shake hands on that deal, but Naboth didn't even have to sleep on his decision he knew what to do. Naboth respected God. He honored God's designs for life, knowing that the rules were set up by God for a reason. One of those reasons was to extend God's faithfulness from generation to generation. If Naboth had taken Ahab up on his offer he and his wife would have lived very comfortably for the next several years, but there would have been nothing left for his children and his grandchildren. So he refused.

There is a tension here in this story, a tension that isn't regulated to people who were interacting 2700 years ago; this text is a challenge to us today, even if we aren't dealing in vineyards or vegetable gardens. The tension that we may feel in this story is the one that involves choice, we are reminded in the story of Ahab and Naboth that we face choices every day in all areas of our lives and when we are faced with these choices, we can choose to approach them as Christians, people who are in covenant with God or we can conveniently forget and ignore some of the basic tenants of our faith.

Each and every day our spiritual integrity seems like it is up for grabs. Each and every day, literally moment by moment, we choose if we are going to love things, we choose if we are going to ignore the covenants we have made with God, we may even sometimes choose to ignore God. The tension comes because we know that we also have the choice to love God and see all things through God's eyes and do the things that we have promised to do.





What do we do in a moment like that? In moments of decision do you approach it with spiritual integrity or do you hope that you can make a decision and take action and hope it slips God's attention?

This text is a challenge for us in a culture that seems to be repeating many of the things that were going on in the court of Ahab and Jezebel. Today the powerful and rich can still take away from the poor the little that they have, and this happens here in our nation and on a larger scale, between the rich and poor nations of the world. The question we face concerns that familiar but difficult call to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable."

Because really, when was the last time we stepped out of our comfort zone to re-present the living Christ in the world? We often try to forget what we may be dimly aware of, that if we stand by and let other do things that benefit us, we are participating in the wrongdoing all the same...

I would like to remind you again of the turtles of Sala-ma-sond who you met this morning during children's time. I saw an immediate kin-ship between Yertle and Ahab...two bored rulers who thought that if they could see it they could have it, if they could see it they could rule it and to get it they stopped at nothing. It may not seem right, it may seem frivolous to compare Ahab's sin of murder to Yertle's enslavement of turtles, but I want you to see that injustice, is injustice and the only way to stop it, is through our spiritual integrity, the only way to stop it is to make the choice to burp, to make the noise that will upset the status quo, to make the noise to let people know that you are a Christian person and the way that you are going to make decisions is based on your covenant with God.



There is a temptation to imagine that choices, deep choices, important choices are no longer available to us, that the present global system of power and money have closed off all alternatives. It just means that in today's world, to practice our faith may take courageous imagination; it may mean that we choose to take a leap of faith and feed hungry children in a town park. It may mean that we stop using Mexican as derogatory slang and remind ourselves to respect a culture and a people who are different and yet the same because they too are God's children. It may mean that this time we DO write that letter to our congressman to complain about the 740 serious safety violations that BP incurred last year and were still allowed to continue to operate, it may mean that we identify ourselves by our faith and not by our age, sex or location.

We have choices every day we have choices, are you Yertle or Mack, Ahab or Naboth? Only you can choose. HA

