

Sunday November 14, 2021
Lesson 11: A Meal of Reconciliation
Scripture: 1 Samuel 25: 2-39

Context:

The 2021 fall series is titled “Belong.” Each unit will focus on a way the people of God are called to seek community and discover how God has connected us to one another. Today we continue the unit “The Fellowship of the Table,” an exploration of the table our Lord provides to us and how we can share life with each other in meals and hospitality. This lesson “A Meal of Reconciliation” explores how the experience of a meal together can overcome human differences and lead to grace.

The lesson comes from the book of First Samuel, a book in the Old Testament chronicling the rise of kingship in Israel. First Samuel particularly focuses upon the transition from King Saul to King David. The setting of the scripture passage starts on the second verse of the twenty-fifth chapter, with the first verse describing the death of Samuel, who has played a major role in the narrative for both Saul and David. Now David is on his own and this narrative will show us how the promises of God fall on his side.

The narrative of David, Nabal, and Abigail helps us to see the potential blind spots of David and thus the need for others to complement and help him to see new ways of being. The first two characters introduced are complete foils. On one hand, there is Nabal, whose very name translates to “fool,” known for his focus on possessions and churlish behavior.¹ He stands in contrast to his wife Abigail who is both of “good understanding and beautiful,” representing what is wise for David and others.² Their descriptions end out playing into the narrative.

As David has been on the run and acquired a band of followers, there is the need for provisions and hospitality. Being near the property of Nabal, David inquires where he might receive hospitality and receive something as they continue on their journey. They do not harm Nabal’s servants in coming his way and thus expect something in return. Nabal is not inclined to give something to those wandering about and thus sends his messengers back with nothing.

As we learn with David, he is not averse to shedding blood and thus prepares his crew to attack Nabal’s household. Abigail, receiving a word from the messenger, goes directly to David bringing food and provisions. Abigail emphasizes the future of David and pleads for remembrance for her and those in the household.

David’s response shows how he recognizes the warning in Abigail’s words. In this parallel situation with different resolution to the Uriah and Bathsheba episode, David is saved from doing wrong as Abigail saves his life and his future.³ The narrative

¹ Brueggemann, Walter. “First and Second Samuel,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 175.

² Ibid. 176.

³ Ibid. 180.

concludes with Abigail revealing her actions to her husband, his heart becoming stone, and then dying. David praises God and then invites Abigail to be his wife.

Application

Abigail is one of the lesser known and discussed heroines in God's story in the scriptures. Yet when we read this narrative, we see how she exhibits the gifts of hospitality, risky discipleship, and faithfulness. Recently, I have heard several women comment on how much they love her story and find her actions an inspiration for how they labor in God's kingdom.

Abigail provides an example for all of us in how some conflicts and competing values can be settled in a meal as grace is shared. In the case of Abigail, she can protect an entire household and prevent a future king from a rocky start to his reign. Her offer of food and meal is more than giving nourishment to the body; it is also about nourishment to the soul.

As often as we think of mealtime as something to check off the list, certain meals can transform the way we see life and ourselves. When bread is broken with others, we realize how everyone needs nourishment for energy and everyone is human. The table can be a place where we shed the pretenses and the formalities, depending on the context.

I have often seen meals be a place where relationships can begin or bloom, and I have also seen how the table can be a place where guns are fired, and battle lines drawn. In either case, much resides in the people who gather and what they bring to the table. If we come to a meal in a spirit of openness and hospitality, much can be expanded and perhaps new relationships can be formed or strengthened.

I think this can especially be true in the cases when we gather with people who are different than us. Often, we eat with people we are related to or like. And that is a good thing. We need the community and shared space with those we love. Yet even at the table we discover how different we are from even those who we consider close to us. Yet from time to time, I've also seen how sharing a meal at the table with those completely different from us can transform us and remind us of the importance of connection.

When I was in college at Birmingham-Southern, I had the privilege to be a part of an Interfaith group which would visit various worshipping communities of different faiths. While I greatly enjoyed watching and observing how they worshipped, I've realized I learned even more in the meals to follow the events. In several cases, unless prohibited by religious fasts, we would dine with the leaders of the community or the equivalent of a lay leader in their religious expression.

As we dined, we were able to ask questions and get to know these individuals as everyday people like you and me. There were of course stark differences to the beliefs and philosophies I had of life and faith, yet there were similarities as well. These people cared about where their kids went to school and the communities we live in. They had understandings of vocation and how it connected to life and faith. We discussed stereotypes and how no religious tradition should be categorized a certain way because of extremists who used God as a synonym for power and control. I came to understand how we may never agree or think alike on matters of faith, yet we could indeed learn to live together and take care of the communities we found ourselves in.

It does not have to be an interfaith experience for you to find those places where you can have a meal with those different than you. It can be a different expression of the

Christian faith, someone of a different race, or someone of a different political ideology. The odds are all of us will discover we are never as similar to those in our circles as we may believe. Think though of how maybe that meal could help you to understand and to celebrate the similarities you share and even how those differences might be a gift.

Who stands out to you in this narrative and how do they connect to your story with God? How does Abigail show us the power of hospitality? Why do you think meals allow us to share life and shed the masks we hide behind? Have you ever had a meal or dinner with someone which changed your mind about how you saw life? How did Jesus eating with other people transform the world and spread the gospel?

Rev. Dr. E. Hunter Pugh
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge
PO Box 71
Brantley, AL 36009