

1 Samuel 25
When Beauty Meets Surley
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A few years ago, this video aired, and as the saying goes, it broke the internet. But to all the moms and women of the church I want to offer you this gesture of affirmation and levity, affirming how demanding your work can be. The way you navigate careers, children, relationships, and still find a way to make us feel loved and nurtured at home. I hope this brings a smile to your face.

Video

Briefly, by a show of hands, how many women can relate to this? Keep your hands up. And now by a show of hands, how many men, can also relate to the frenetic feeling of just trying to hold it together? And for those hands not raised, well now I know what I'm going to preach about next week...honesty.

There is an epidemic sweeping the country and the church is not immune to it, researchers call it hurry sickness. It is the relentless pressure to hold everything together, to project the image that my marriage, my children, my house, my career is perfect—or at least well put together. When the reality might be that below the surface it's all just scotch taped together. Our definition of health and stability and beauty is confronted everyday by images and messages that seeking to shape how we feel about ourselves and about our families. When the truth is our marriage might be on the precipice, our jobs may be deeply unfulfilling, and the worry about whether our kids will turn out the way we hope, or will know their God-implanted worth confronts us daily.

Well this morning I want to turn our attention to a woman whose beauty and presence enables David see clearly his God-given identity, an identity that had been marred by pride and revenge. With grace and tact Abigail is able to see through the messes those around her have made, and point them back to the God-imprinted identity. Like many of the women in our lives Abigail reflected light in dark moments.

Text 1 Samuel 25:1-25, 32-37

David and his men are once again on the run from King Saul, who wanted them dead. If you recall David was anointed King, and this news didn't sit well with the outgoing administration. So for years, David fled the pursuits of Saul, making his home in the desert. But it is in the Desert where David is prepared for Kingship, and his followers are prepared for discipleship. It was in the desert where all the trappings of royalty were stripped away that David learned—above all—dependence.

In the Gospels after Jesus' baptism he went immediately into the desert to be tested. And what was tested above all was not his hunger or thirst, but his dependence upon the Father for his God-breathed, God-given identity. Sometimes it takes setting everything aside to see what is truly needful.

But the wilderness is not a safe place, people didn't venture to the wilderness unless they absolutely had to. Bandits and marauders roamed the wilderness waiting to take advantage of vulnerable

people. Jesus tells the story in Luke 10 of the man robbed on the road to Jericho, and is rescued by a good Samaritan (a good foreigner).

In the wilderness David and his men became something of a neighborhood watch for herdsmen and shepherds. One whose flock they guarded was a man named Nabal, a wealthy man. Not only did David keep Nabal's sheep, but he also introduced some semblance of the law to an otherwise lawless environment—all to the benefit of Nabal.

At the end of a season, when it was customary to celebrate during Sheepshearing time, David sends a few of his guys to Nabal with a very modest request:

Let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. Please give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David.

“Nabal, clearly you are a man of great wealth, and look we are scratching out an existence out here. We've kept your investment safe, not a one of your flock was harmed in our keeping, would you mind giving us a few of the most expendable sheep in your flock?”

But when Nabal hears the request from David, he not only denied the request, but deeply insulted David at the same time. **“Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters. “ Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers and give it to men who come from I do not know where?”**

Well David snaps, and he flies off the handle and is now bent on revenge. Now the wilderness, a time of spiritual discovery and purpose finding, all of a sudden turns into a Quentin Tarantino revenge plot. He rallies the troops and sets out for Nabal's camp, where he's going to get even. Surly and prideful Nabal draws out the very same in David.

God do so to the enemies of David^(b) and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him.”

All along David has been able to see the preciousness and God imprinted value in Saul, the man who pursued David's life in the wilderness. Just a few chapters earlier was this scene where David and his men were hiding from Saul in a cave, when the bible says that Saul came to relieve himself—not knowing that David was right there and could have easily killed his pursuer. But instead cuts a small piece of Saul's garment to show him that though he could have easily ended Saul's life, he chose the path of mercy.

But somehow now the wilderness had finally got to him and he couldn't see Nabal as anything more than the rotten piece of garbage he was. But in the process David is running the risk of turning into another Saul.

When I was in High School, I had the chance to play on a team with the class of teammates who were one year older than me. And as adolescent youths sometimes do, I wanted to fit in with my teammates. So, when invited to a high school party that I would normally would not have gone to, I wanted to show them that I was cool. Well, poor decisions were made and that news reached back

to my mom and dad. I remember sitting with them at the kitchen table and my mom looking intently at me and saying: “this is not who you are.” Our moms know us, perhaps better than anyone else, and they can see when we are not being true to ourselves and to God. This is not who you are, Abigail says to David.

Each of you has an identity. And in a culture that tells us that it’s up to us to create our identities, the Gospel and our baptism says, “Identity is not for you to create, but to receive.” You are beloved, chosen, sealed, appointed, and sent. But we all need voices, like that of our moms and grandmas who remind us who we are.

So, when Abigail, Nabal’s wife, hears of what’s coming for her husband, she rallies the best feast she can come up with in a moment’s notice. How many of you mom’s have ever gotten the call from a child or a husband saying, “the boss is coming over tonight, or a neighbor is coming over, or a new guy or girl who might be the one is coming over tonight and had to make something appear almost out of thin air?” I don’t know how you do it.

But Abigail loads up a donkey and sets out to get to David before he gets to Nabal. She knew that emotions had gotten the best of these two men, and that there was something in both that needed redeeming. You see, Abigail had the rare gift to perceive the call of God on David’s life. Even though it was only reputation, Abigail could see this is not who he was. She also had the courage to intercept him and keep him from tragically marring that image. Interestingly, because of this story Abigail is listed in the Talmud (central religious and theological document for the Jews) among 4 women of surpassing beauty. She is also listed among the female prophets of the Old Testament Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Sarah, Huldah, and Esther.

Eugene Peterson puts it this way: “Your task David, is not to exact revenge, that’s God’s business, and you aren’t God. You’re out here in the wilderness to find out what God is doing and who you are before God. The wilderness is where you discover the strength of God and God’s faithfulness working in your life.”

Amazingly, David stops, looks, and listens. Abigail’s beauty, sensitivity, her attentiveness to the Spirit of God enables her to see within David what he is no longer able to see in himself. Abigail can see God’s Spirit that has been marred by wounded pride, and is able to point David past the immediacy of his own misguided passion and remind him who he is.

That is a depth of beauty and sensitivity that reaches into the fabric of a human being, and it has probably been shown to us most visibly by the women in our lives. Our mothers, our grandmothers, our aunts and sisters. You, like Abigail are a powerful witness to the God-created, God-sustained, God-blessed life that everywhere present around us, but that we are often blinded by our willfulness and idolatry to see. Again, Eugene Peterson puts it this way: “Abigail’s beauty surprises David out of his sudden plunge into ugliness, where he is able to see and hear God again.”

A few years ago, I had the chance to visit the Holy Land with a group from The Outreach Foundation. We visited many of the sites that tell the story of Jesus’ life—many preserved by the Eastern Orthodox Churches. What we saw in these places were rich tapestries, intricate icons, and beautiful art that tells the stories of our faith. Witness through beauty.

Sadly, in some ways the tradition of encountering beauty and transcendence in our faith through visual and physical expressions has been lost in our protestant traditions. You see, it's the artists who have a way of waking up our jaded senses to pay attention to matter of God's presence and good news in our lives. The vocation of artists to rouse our senses to the beauty of the wind and flowers, birds and rock and cloud. Beauty in the ocean and mountain, in star and in sand. Beauty in the storm and meadow, in laughter and in play.

Again, Eugene Peterson writes: "Beauty releases light into our awareness so that we're conscious of the beauty of the Lord. "It makes icons of us all. Each of us becomes a work of art, reflecting God's glory."

Abigail's beauty puts David back in touch with the Lord's beauty. He realizes what he's doing, what his life is for, who he was created to be. Abigail's beauty was a revealing mirror, so that in her David sees himself as God sees him. Abigail recovers for David the identity God had given him.

There is nothing more common in our life with Christ than beginning with great purpose and passion, and then going wrong. We start out with purity of heart, but someone offends us and our self-importance flares up and we're off to do something about it. Usually the heat of the moment clouds our judgment, because we're so wrapped up in ourselves.

And then we're stopped by something beautiful. A child, a friend, a cloud, a fragremce. Abigail.

And suddenly we realize that we are very different at our core, than what we are feeling at that moment. Wrapped up in ourselves we've forgotten entirely of God; with Nabal reduced to nothing more than a footnote in the text of our life.