

Rev. Danny Mackey  
Ash Wednesday  
February 14, 2018  
1 Kings 21:1-16  
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

A reading from 1 Kings, chapter 21:

Now Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. And after this Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house, and 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 the inheritance of my fathers." And Ahab went into his house vexed and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him, for he had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and would eat no food.

But Jezebel his wife came to him and said to him, "Why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food?" And he said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money, or else, if it please you, I will give you another vineyard for it.' And he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" And Jezebel his wife said to him, "Do you now govern Israel? Arise and eat bread and let your heart 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, and she sent the letters to the elders and the leaders who lived with Naboth in his city. And she wrote in the letters, "Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the people. And set two worthless men opposite him, and let them bring a charge against him, saying, 'You have cursed God and the king.' Then take him out and stone him to death." And the men of his city, the elders and the leaders who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. As it was written in the letters that she had sent to them, they proclaimed a fast and set Naboth at the head of the people. And the two worthless men came in and sat opposite him. And the worthless men 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 with stones. 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, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money, for Naboth is not alive, but dead." And as soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

This is the Word of the Lord.

The following sermon was written by Rev. Brent Kuhlman, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Murdock, Nebraska.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

His majesty King Ahab craves what he categorically *cannot* have. He flat out covets. His coveting consumes him. He breaks the Ninth and Tenth Commandments. What does his royal heart desire? Ahab desperately covets Naboth's vineyard. Along the way, Ahab will break even more commandments as a result of his ravenous coveting. You'll see that in a few minutes as we review the story.

His Majesty wants to plow under the grapery and convert it into a hug organic vegetable garden. Brilliant! Everyone in the kingdom, especially the school children, needs to eat more vegetables. Cut out the fatty foods and sugary snacks and drinks. Help end the elementary and adolescent obesity crisis. Yes, that's the ticket! More vegetables. And organic to boot! What a king!

Surely his neighbor Naboth will agree. As long as it's "for the children!" His Highness did ask nicely too. He offers Naboth a bargain he can't refuse. His Majesty will clinch the deal. Naboth can name his price; the sky's the limit! Additionally, in exchange for his family's grapery, His Majesty will give Naboth one of the kingdom's finest vineyards. Napa-Tuscany-Bordeaux all wrapped into one!

Naboth...categorically declines. Right to the king's face! "The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers." Right. The Lord had given the land to Naboth's family. It was theirs to take care of as the Lord's instruments. Ahab knew that. Naboth was right. The king, even with all his royal power, couldn't have what didn't belong to him. And it was sinful to want it and try to get it even in a way that appeared right.

Ahab goes home. To his bedroom. To pray? To repent? Nor hardly. Like a spoiled brat, he pouts on his bed. Frustrated and angry. A royal temper tantrum! Punches the pillows. Tears up the sheets. Refuses to eat supper—not even his favorite, prime rib and Mediterranean lobster. Her Highness, Jezebel the queen, gets wind of what's happened, and she get the skinny from Ahab himself.

She's taken aback. But she thinks quickly on her feet. "Honey, you're the king. You should have anything you want. Chin up, dear! Cheer up, love! I'll take care of it. I'll get the vineyard for you. Wait and see! Soon you'll be producing the best organic vegetables for the

kids that the kingdom can raise! You'll be able to write a best-selling veggie recipe book and get all the prime-time morning interviews with [Hoda Kotb], Lara Spencer, and Nora O'Donnell. Maybe even [David Letterman will interview you on his new Netflix show!] They'll just gush! Everyone will praise you, O King! Behold the king's organic vegetable garden! This is the king who loves children! What a reward you'll get!"

So Queen Jezebel schemes. Hatches a plan. A plot. It's brilliant! Jezebel will set up Naboth. Frame him. Trump up false charges. She'll get Naboth's inheritance in a way that appears so right! So kosher! So legitimate! So just! So within the law! So God-pleasing! And Ahab goes along with the plan. He still covets the vineyard. He'll take it any way he can get it now.

She writes letters in Ahab's name. Puts the king's seal on them. And the letters are sent to all the bigwigs of Naboth's hometown, Jezreel. The letters from the king say: "Proclaim a day of fasting [fasting—something must be dreadfully wrong in the kingdom] and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. Seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them testify that he [Naboth] has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death."

You'd think that the elders and nobles of Jezreel would know better. Naboth would never do that! So, there must have been immense corruption, payoffs, and bribes going on in that city. The elders and nobles eagerly take part in this wicked, wicked plot.

Royal henchmen. Flunkies! Lackeys! Goons! *They actually carry out the order!* The liars-for-hire passionately under oath maintain Naboth has committed unforgiveable crimes. Capital crimes. Punishable by death! "Naboth has cursed God and King Ahab!" they repeat over and over again under examination at the outdoor court.

Everyone in town is outraged. Anyone who curses both God and the king must suffer the consequences! No matter how well liked or respected. Cursing God and the king falls under the zero-tolerance policy! Naboth must die! So, the Jezreelites surround Naboth. There's no escape. Like summer thunderstorm hail, they hurl, chuck, and launch rocks the size of baseballs, softballs, and volleyballs at him until he's graveyard dead. As the Law demands. ... Appeared so God-pleasing and so religious! Just as Jezebel planned! Can you imagine her devilish grin?

The huge pool of blood from Naboth's bashed-in brains, unrecognizable face, and assaulted dead body had barely cooled when Ahab took possession of the coveted vineyard. And rightly so—it appeared. After all, Naboth had cursed God and the king! So Ahab had the legal right to take the vineyard now! Right?

No! Absolutely not! You know the Ninth and Tenth Commandments and how Luther explains them. [Let's recite them together, as they are printed in our bulletin:

**The Ninth Commandment**

You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

*What does this mean?* We should fear and love God, so that we do not craftily seek to gain our neighbor's inheritance or home, nor get it by a show of right, but help and serve him in keeping it.

**The Tenth Commandment**

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his cattle, nor anything that is his.

*What does this mean?* We should fear and love God, so that we do not tempt, force or coax away from our neighbor his wife or his workers, but urge them to stay and do their duty.]

Ahab coveted big time! Like all sin, it's spiritually deadly. It's a spiritual cancer that spreads unrelentingly. His coveting gave birth to more cancerous and deadly sin. Devious and well-thought-out lies (Second Commandment). Outrageous slander and fanatical false testimony (Eight Commandment). Theft (Seventh Commandment). Cold-blooded murder (Fifth Commandment).

He did all this because he did not fear, love, and trust in God above all things (First Commandment)! Let's not forget that Ahab was into idolatry big time! He was a hardcore false worshiper! He worshiped many false gods and encouraged his people to do the same. No wonder he broke so many of the Commandments and didn't [care in the least.] It's no surprise that he lost no sleep over the outrageous setup and brutal murder of Naboth.

What about you? Do you think you're any better than Ahab? You're not. Really, you're not! You're a sinner too. You covet just like he did. You scheme and plot too in order to get what you want. And you'd do anything to get what you want. Cheat, lie, steal. Even murder? Yes. Even murder. You may not do it with a gun or a knife but you do it with hate-filled words and an enraged and jealous heart. And just like Ahab, you'd be sure to make it all look so right. So legit! So religious and pious!

Ahab's story is your story. The Holy Spirit puts this account in the Bible in order to interpret you! This Old Testament story of Ahab's coveting is the Holy Spirit's attack on you, the sinner, through this divine Word! With Ahab's coveting and all the other horrific sin that flowed from it, the Holy Spirit leads you to recognize your own sin in your own life.

God [categorically] forbids coveting! No ifs, ands, or buts! But you do it anyway. You covet like there's no tomorrow: 24-7-365. Like King Ahab retreads. As if God doesn't exist. Or as if God simply cannot be trusted to take care of you. So tonight is the night to repent. A Lenten repentance. Living in and from your Baptism into Christ.

And that means, unlike Ahab who wouldn't do it, it's time to confess that you truly are a sinner and admit that you covet because you do not trust God. Own up to it. Tell the truth.

So that this Ash Wednesday, this Lenten and Eastertide, as well as all your life, *you have good use of...Jesus*, the Savior of coveters. I'm here to tell you that Jesus died for you masters of coveting. Here is the truth: all your coveting and all the other sin that flows from your coveting belong to Jesus. He wrapped Himself up in all of it so that He was counted as the coveter, slanderer, thief, murderer, and idolater *par excellence*, and then He took all its hellacious damnation. That's Good Friday. *God for you!* You are forgiven! That's His divine promise.

And with that,

YOU NOW DESIRE A GIFT...THAT JESUS SAYS *IS YOURS*.

That He wants you to have. Tonight. Every Sunday. The rest of your life. What's that? His body and blood. Fruit from the vineyard and fruit from the cross! "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sin." Your heart is content with such a promise! So that you also now want to help and be of service to your neighbor in keeping what belongs to him. Acting as a little Christ. Serving your neighbor in love.

Happy Ash Wednesday. In the name of Jesus.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in + Christ Jesus.