

# One Face of Peace

Sermon

1 Samuel 25:32-35

Debra Mumford

*This sermon was preached at the Seventh Annual Spring Conference of the Pacific Coast Baptist Association on Saturday, May 7, 2005. The conference was held at the First Baptist Church in Palo Alto, CA. The theme of the conference was, "The Many Faces of Peace."*

Text: 1 Samuel 25:32-35

## One Face of Peace

It was an ordinary day in the life of Abigail. As the wife of a wealthy landowner in Ancient Israel, Abigail was going about her duty of managing the household. Abigail and her husband, Nabal, lived in Carmel which was adjacent to the wilderness of Moan. Nabal owned much land, three thousand sheep and one thousand goats. The text describes Nabal as mean and surly, while Abigail is deemed clever and beautiful.

On this particular day, Abigail was assessing her food provisions, making sure there was enough food to feed all of the workers who were sheering sheep with her husband. As she was going about her duty, she saw one of her husband's workers running towards her. She could tell he was very upset. Since this was very unusual posture for him, Abigail began to walk in his direction. When she reached him, he began to tell her what was wrong.

The young man told her that Nabal had insulted David. David the mighty warrior. David the one about whom women sang songs. Women sang that Saul had killed his thousands. David had killed his tens of thousands. This was the same David who had slain the giant Goliath.

There was a time when David and his men had dwelled in the wilderness called Moan while fleeing Saul. When Nabal's men had been in the wilderness tending their sheep, David watched out for Nabal's men and sheep. David made sure that no harm came to them.

Earlier that morning David decided to call in the favor by sending some of his men to Nabal requesting that Nabal provide food to help feed David's four hundred men. David told his representatives to remind Nabal of what David had done for him. After all, it was because of David that Nabal had not lost one sheep nor had any of his workers suffered any harm while shepherding the sheep in the wilderness.

However, upon hearing David's request, the mean and surly Nabal said an outright "no." He refused to give David and his men anything, not even one morsel of bread. Nabal seemed not only not to remember who David was, but he even stated that for all he knew David could be a run-away slave. When David heard the report of the incident, he went ballistic. How could Nabal not remember who David was and what David had done for him? How could Nabal refuse David's request? As a result, David was on his way to the house of Nabal to kill every man in the house. All because Nabal had insulted David's pride.

Upon hearing this news Abigail immediately began to think about what she should do. She did not spend a lot of time contemplating. She immediately leapt into action. Since she was in charge of the distribution of food for the household, she immediately gathered food provision such as loaves of bread, wine, meat, raisins, grain, and cakes of figs. She put the provisions on donkeys and sent some young men ahead of her to meet David and his posse. Abigail followed closely behind the young men on a donkey.

Picture this, on the one hand there was David the mighty warrior advancing toward Abigail and the household of Nabal with four hundred men, each bearing a sharp sword and wearing full armor. On the other hand, there is Abigail and a handful of her hired workers advancing toward David and his four hundred men, bearing much food.

This contrast seems absurd. At least until it is unpacked a bit. You see, what was about to happen was a showdown between two very different ways of being in the world. David was a warrior. So what he knew best was how to resolve problems by show of military force. Abigail on the other hand was a mother. As the mother of her household, one of the skills she had to develop to fulfill her daily tasks was the ability to peacefully resolve issues in the home.

As a warrior, David was willing to take innocent lives to rescue and resurrect his wounded pride while maintaining his reputation as a mighty warrior. As a mother, whose inclination was to seek peace, Abigail was willing to lay aside her pride to save the lives of all the people in her household.

As Abigail approached David, she dismounted her donkey, fell on her face before David, and did obeisance before him. Doing obeisance was an act of the utmost respect and humility usually reserved for Kings and other officials. David was prepared for battle. Instead he was given the utmost respect. This must have been extremely disarming.

With her face still to the ground, Abigail began to speak. The first words she said were that she alone should bear the guilt of the incident that happened earlier with her husband. As Nabal's name was, so was he. In other words, Nabal's name meant foolish, and he surely lived up to his name. With this statement, Abigail had dismissed Nabal and his behavior as simply insignificant.

Abigail continued to speak calling David her lord. Abigail told David that God had sent her to him so that David would be restrained from taking vengeance into his own hands. David was completely silent at this point. Abigail had very skillfully commanded his attention. David continued to listen. Next, Abigail asked for forgiveness for her part in the incident. When we read this text we find that the only thing Abigail was guilty of was not being present when David's men spoke to Nabal.

Then Abigail said that when God made David prince over Israel, by not taking vengeance into his own hands, David would be able to assume the throne with a clear conscience for not having shed innocent blood. She not only affirmed his present strength as a warrior, she also affirmed his future, as the one to lead the nations of Israel and Judah.

David must have been convicted at this point. His response was "Blessed be God of Israel who sent you to me today! Blessed be your good sense and blessed be you who kept me from blood guilt and from avenging myself by my own hand."

How many of us are more like David than Abigail? We resolve our issues by fighting either verbally or physically when our pride suffers damage. We are willing to do whatever it takes to restore our pride even if it means hurting someone else. If we are looking for a face of peace, we can look to Abigail. She did obeisance to David even though he was not yet king as a show of respect and strategy to disarm. She provided David with the provisions he wanted while realizing that food was not really the primary issue. David's pride had been severely wounded. She had the good sense to carefully and skillfully tend his wound. And she apologized for actions over which she had no control.

How many of us here today recognize that if a warrior like David could admit that not waging war on innocent people was "good sense," then maybe some of our nations leaders can learn a lesson or two from Abigail's peace-seeking ways?

Even those of us who are more like David can learn to seek peace. We can look to Abigail as our example. But we can also look inside ourselves for the Christ whose Spirit inhabits us. Each of us who claims to be a follower of Christ has the potential to be a face of

peace in this world. All we have to do is to allow the Spirit of Christ reign within us. After all, Christ is our peace.