# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Restraining Grace”**

**1 Samuel 25:1-38**

 **July 4, 2021**

This morning we continue our summer sermon series on the life of David, a man after God’s own heart. David has been anointed king by the prophet Samuel. But the current king, Saul, is chasing him and trying to kill him.

Last Sunday we saw David at his best. David had the opportunity to kill Saul in the cave of En-gedi. But instead of taking Saul’s life, David trusted God that God would take care of him. David showed honor, patience, and reverence by sparing Saul.

The David we meet this morning in 1 Samuel 25 seems like a completely different person. He is reactive, angry and vengeful, acting rashly when provoked. I invite you to join me in 1 Samuel 25:1-22

Now Samuel died, and all Israel gathered for his funeral. They buried him at his house in Ramah. Then David moved down to the wilderness of Maon. There was a wealthy man from Maon who owned property near the town of Carmel. He had 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats, and it was sheep-shearing time. This man’s name was Nabal, and his wife, Abigail, was a sensible and beautiful woman. But Nabal, a descendant of Caleb, was crude and mean in all his dealings. When David heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep, he sent ten of his young men to Carmel with this message for Nabal: “Peace and prosperity to you, your family, and everything you own! I am told that it is sheep-shearing time. While your shepherds stayed among us near Carmel, we never harmed them, and nothing was ever stolen from them. Ask your own men, and they will tell you this is true. So would you be kind to us, since we have come at a time of celebration? Please share any provisions you might have on hand with us and with your friend David.” David’s young men gave this message to Nabal in David’s name, and they waited for a reply. “Who is this fellow David?” Nabal sneered to the young men. “Who does this son of Jesse think he is? There are lots of servants these days who run away from their masters. Should I take my bread and my water and my meat that I’ve slaughtered for my shearers and give it to a band of outlaws who come from who knows where?” So David’s young men returned and told him what Nabal had said. “Get your swords!” was David’s reply as he strapped on his own. Then 400 men started off with David, and 200 remained behind to guard their equipment. Meanwhile, one of Nabal’s servants went to Abigail and told her, “David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master, but he screamed insults at them. These men have been very good to us, and we never suffered any harm from them. Nothing was stolen from us the whole time they were with us. In fact, day and night they were like a wall of protection to us and the sheep. You need to know this and figure out what to do, for there is going to be trouble for our master and his whole family. He’s so ill-tempered that no one can even talk to him!” Abigail wasted no time. She quickly gathered 200 loaves of bread, two wineskins full of wine, five sheep that had been slaughtered, nearly a bushel of roasted grain, 100 clusters of raisins, and 200 fig cakes. She packed them on donkeys and said to her servants, “Go on ahead. I will follow you shortly.” But she didn’t tell her husband Nabal what she was doing. As she was riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, she saw David and his men coming toward her. David had just been saying, “A lot of good it did to help this fellow. We protected his flocks in the wilderness, and nothing he owned was lost or stolen. But he has repaid me evil for good. May God strike me and kill meif even one man of his household is still alive tomorrow morning!”

The story begins with the introduction of two people, Nabal and Abigail, who happen to be married to each other. Nabal is wealthy, owning much property, and he is cruel and mean in all his dealings. He is a bad man, inside and out. Abigail, however, is sensible and beautiful. She is a good woman, inside and out.

David, the third main character in our story, is on the run from Saul with his 600 men, but they have been helping people along the way. We saw this in an earlier chapter when they saved the city of Keilah. Now we discover that David has been helping Nabal, and he decides to ask for some kindness in return. Sending ten of his men, he instructs them to greet Nabal respectfully with words of peace, and to ask Nabal to share some of the provisions from the feast with them. David is making a reasonable request.

David’s reasonable request is met with a rude refusal. “Who is David? Another one of those servants whose master can’t count on him? Why should I share anything of mine with someone like him?” Nabal is the kind of person who always seems to say the wrong thing at the wrong time. Perhaps you have someone like that in your life, someone who no matter how reasonable you feel you are being will find a way to be unreasonable. What do you do when that happens? How do you react?

David reacts rashly. “Strap on your swords,” he says to his men, and takes 400 of them with him to let Nabal know how he feels about Nabal’s insult. How quickly he has moved from speaking peace to seeking vengeance, from sparing Saul’s life to wanting to take Nabal’s.

A reasonable request has been met by a rude refusal which has led to a rash reaction. The man after God’s own heart has decided that in this situation he is going to follow his own heart, all because of an insult. David, whom Saul praised last week for returning good for Saul’s evil, is ready to return evil for evil. Even the best of men are men at best. Even those who hearts are committed to God will, at times, find their hearts moving in ungodly directions. So, how will things turn out? Will David end up committing mass murder because of a foolish man’s rudeness? Let continue the story in 1 Samuel

When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed low before him. She fell at his feet and said, “I accept all blame in this matter, my lord. Please listen to what I have to say. I know Nabal is a wicked and ill-tempered man; please don’t pay any attention to him. He is a fool, just as his name suggests. But I never even saw the young men you sent. “Now, my lord, as surely as the Lord lives and you yourself live, since the Lord has kept you from murdering and taking vengeance into your own hands, let all your enemies and those who try to harm you be as cursed as Nabal is. And here is a present that I, your servant, have brought to you and your young men. Please forgive me if I have offended you in any way. The Lord will surely reward you with a lasting dynasty, for you are fighting the Lord’s battles. And you have not done wrong throughout your entire life. “Even when you are chased by those who seek to kill you, your life is safe in the care of the Lord your God, secure in his treasure pouch! But the lives of your enemies will disappear like stones shot from a sling! When the Lord has done all he promised and has made you leader of Israel, don’t let this be a blemish on your record. Then your conscience won’t have to bear the staggering burden of needless bloodshed and vengeance. And when the Lord has done these great things for you, please remember me, your servant!” David replied to Abigail, “Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you to meet me today! Thank God for your good sense! Bless you for keeping me from murder and from carrying out vengeance with my own hands. For I swear by the Lord, the God of Israel, who has kept me from hurting you, that if you had not hurried out to meet me, not one of Nabal’s men would still be alive tomorrow morning.” Then David accepted her present and told her, “Return home in peace. I have heard what you said. We will not kill your husband.” When Abigail arrived home, she found that Nabal was throwing a big party and was celebrating like a king. He was very drunk, so she didn’t tell him anything about her meeting with David until dawn the next day. In the morning when Nabal was sober, his wife told him what had happened. As a result he had a stroke, and he lay paralyzed on his bed like a stone. About ten days later, the Lord struck him, and he died.

What kind of woman tries to intervene between an angry warrior bent on violence and an ignorant, mean-spirited fool of a husband? A brave woman, a woman whose good sense gives her the right words to say to the warrior, a woman after God’s own heart. Yes, Abigail is the one who steps in and helps to avert the rash reaction of David becoming a tragedy. But, God is also the One who steps in. “Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you to meet me today,” declares David. He sees Abigail, but he also sees the restraining grace of God at work in his life. He hears Abigail’s words of reminder of who he is, but he also hears God’s word through her. He listens as Abigail warns him against committing murder and taking matters into his own hands, telling him that such actions will haunt him for the rest of his life, and he knows that he is also listening to the Spirit of God. Because of Abigail and God, David’s rash reaction is transformed into a righteous response. The journey which began with the intent to kill ends with a word of peace.

Like David, we can be reactive to painful and hurtful circumstances and behave rashly. But, like David, we need to be correctible. For, as God did with David, so he will do with us. On our way to take vengeance, to settle the score, to take matters into our own hands, to hurt those who have hurt us, God comes to us with his restraining grace and bids us reconsider. It could be in the form of a person like Abigail, or the Holy Spirit within nudging us with the thought, “Is this really what I should be doing?” James, in his letter in the New Testament, wrote these words which we do well to remember: “Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.” The next time your reasonable request is met with a rude refusal, may the graciously restraining word of God help you to move to a righteous response rather than a rash reaction.