

*The Lessons Appointed for Use on the*

**Sunday closest to June 15**

**Proper 6**

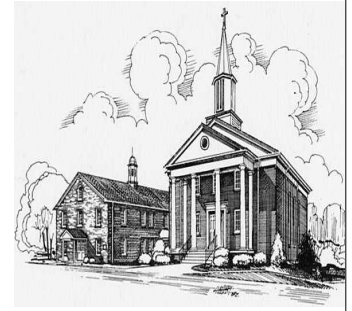
**Year C**

**RCL**

1 Kings 21:1-10, 15-21a

Psalms 32

2 Samuel 11:26-12:10, 13-15



The Collect

Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

## **1 Kings 21:1-10, 15-21a**

The following events took place: Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of King Ahab of Samaria. And Ahab said to Naboth, “Give me your vineyard, so that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house; 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 my ancestral inheritance.” Ahab went home resentful and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him; for he had said, “I will not give you my ancestral inheritance.” He lay down on his bed, turned away his face, and would not eat.

His wife Jezebel came to him and said, “Why are you so depressed that you will not eat?” He said to her, “Be-

cause I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, ‘Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard for it’; but he answered, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’” His wife Jezebel said to him, “Do you now govern Israel? Get up, eat some food, and 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; she sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who lived with Naboth in his city. She wrote in the letters, “Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth at the head of the assembly; seat two scoundrels opposite him, and have them bring a charge against him, saying, ‘You have cursed God and the king.’ Then take him out, and stone him to death.”

As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, “Go, take posses-

sion of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead.” As soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab set out to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying: Go down to meet King Ahab of Israel, who rules in Samaria; he is now in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. You shall say to him, “Thus says the LORD: Have you killed, and also taken possession?” You shall say to him, “Thus says the LORD: In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, dogs will also lick up your blood.”

Ahab said to Elijah, “Have you found me, O my enemy?” He answered, “I have found you. Because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the LORD, I will bring disaster on you.”

## **2 Samuel 11:26-12:10,13-15**

When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.

But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD, and the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or

herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the

sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.”

David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Nathan said to David, “Now the LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child that is born to you shall die.” Then Nathan went to his house. The LORD struck the child that Uriah’s wife bore to David, and it became very ill.

***Psalm 32 Page 624, BCP***

***Beati quorum***

- 1 Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven,  
and whose sin is put away!
- 2 Happy are they to whom the LORD imputes no guilt,  
and in whose spirit there is no guile!
- 3 While I held my tongue, my bones withered away,  
because of my groaning all day long.
- 4 For your hand was heavy upon me day and night;  
my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.
- 5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you,  
and did not conceal my guilt.
- 6 I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD."  
Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.
- 7 Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you in time of trouble;  
when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.
- 8 You are my hiding-place;  
you preserve me from trouble;  
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.
- 9 "I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go;  
I will guide you with my eye.
- 10 Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding;  
who must be fitted with bit and bridle,  
or else they will not stay near you."
- 11 Great are the tribulations of the wicked;  
but mercy embraces those who trust in the LORD.
- 12 Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the LORD;  
shout for joy, all who are true of heart.



**Luke 7:36-8:3**

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him – that she is a sinner."

Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

“Teacher,” he replied, “Speak.”

“A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?”

Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt.”

And Jesus said to him, “You have judged rightly.”

Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love.

But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.”

Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.



## SERMON

I love stories. I'm lukewarm about lectures, but I love stories. I had a teacher, Professor Hamm, who was charged with the thankless task of teaching corporation law. At eight o'clock in the morning. Corporation law, you might suppose, is not the most riveting subject to be lectured about at eight o'clock in the morning, and you would be correct in your supposition, but Professor Hamm had one abiding, consuming love which he used to make it bearable – he adored the Ringling Brothers/Barnum and Bailey Circus, which had a surprisingly circuitous history in the courts. Many of his lessons began with circus stories.

It isn't eight o'clock in the morning, and this isn't corporation law, but I've chosen two stories as our text for today because, well, I love stories and I'm lukewarm about lectures in the morning. Let us, you and I,

find the word of God in these stories.

Both stories have to do with kings, something Americans have absolutely no experience with. Ahab was a king of the northern kingdom of Israel in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century b.c.e. David ruled perhaps a century earlier. These were both men whose “Let it be so” made the wheels of their kingdom move smartly. They had tremendous power.

We don’t have any experience with absolute rulers in our time, but I’d be willing to bet that each of us knows a very wealthy person, someone who has achieved all the world offers. Think of that person, and the better if that person also exhibits a sense of entitlement by reason of his or her wealth, someone a bit spoiled.

In the earlier story we learn that King David has an eye for the ladies, or maybe just this one lady, since he

seems to be otherwise supplied with a surfeit of wives. I sympathize, but Mrs. Schneider has been very clear with me about this sort of thing. This is why, although I might have my head turned by a pretty girl, it goes no further – I perceive that there would be unpleasant consequences were it otherwise. David, with his great power and sense of entitlement, has become like my cats. To see is to want. To want is to reach for. To reach for is to grab. David cannot imagine unpleasant consequences from his actions and later neither can Ahab. Their sense of their own power and entitlement blinds them. That's the first thing I'd like to pass on to you: power and wealth hath great power to blind us. I know you think you'd be immune and would handle great wealth and power better, but you wouldn't. Rather than being people whose position in life is something we might envy, these two kings are actually blind men

groping in a world invisible to them. If we focused more on this truth, that power and wealth blinds, we would buy lottery tickets less often.

David wanted Bathsheba and took her, then involved himself in skulduggery to cover up what he had done so as to keep both his reputation and what he had stolen. I much prefer thieves with more integrity than that, but great power and wealth blinds us sufficiently that we imagine we can steal and not be branded thief.

Ahab, on the other hand, wanted Naboth's little patch of ground, and when Naboth refused him, he took to his bed and sulked. He sounds like a small child. He didn't get what he wanted, so he's going to hold his breath until he turns blue and that will show us. What I find most intriguing about Ahab's story, though, is the way he approached Naboth. He didn't go all heavy handed as David might have done. I can imagine him



congratulating himself on how fair he was being. “Give me your vineyard, so that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house; I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money.” Nothing could be fairer. He wants the piece of land, and he’s treating Naboth as more than an equal. “Name your price and conditions, Naboth! I’m a generous man.”

Well, if you are wealthy, you can afford to be generous when dealing with a poor man. Great bounty to him will be chump change to you. It’s win-win. You look generous, he gets some mad money. Except...he doesn’t want to sell. What then? You and I might shrug and go find a more willing seller. Ahab’s delightful wife Jezebel puts out a hit on the guy because what’s more important – some nobody’s life or her husband’s sulk? Besides, sulking is unattractive. “Do you not rule

Israel?” she asks him. Man up, dude!

This is what I mean by a sense of entitlement. Our society, our every understanding, is based on this perversion of the Golden Rule – he who has the gold makes the rules, and don’t try to tell me it isn’t. That’s the world we live in. David and Jezebel are blind to the fact that poor old Uriah and poor old Naboth are children of God and beloved of Him. In the eyes of David and Jezebel, they are merely speed bumps on the road to getting what David wants and what Ahab wants. Uriah and Naboth have been marginalized completely out of existence. They are now invisible.

Invisible people are very hard to relate to. We have discussed the young people killed in the factory collapse in Bangladesh and the Chinese workers killed in the poultry factory fire for the past two weeks. We know that 1,200 were killed in one and 119 in the other,

but when we think about those dead young people, in our minds do they have faces, or are they, like Uriah and Naboth, invisible? When we think on these tragedies, do we picture actual husbands and mothers searching the rubble for loved ones, or do we feel a sort of generic sadness about what happened, but no personal involvement? Are they as visible to us as they are to God, I mean? Closer to home, when we are made aware that more than 30,000 Americans are killed on the highway every year, is that real people, or just a number in your mind? On the one hand, that's an improvement over 1988 when it was nearly 50,000. On the other hand, that's 30,000 people. A year. Dead. That's the cost of high-speed travel and automobile ownership, I suppose you could say. But are those 30,000 people visible to you?

We live lives of astonishing comfort and ease. My

grandmother told me of trips from her home in Leaper, Ohio to Crown City in the buckboard for supplies. It was an all day affair. My aunt spoke of visiting people in Wurtland. They had to stay overnight. We raise vegetable gardens for the joy of it, not for subsistence. It is tempting to view the good things we enjoy as free, as entitlements, but they are not. Someone, somewhere, is paying the price for our ease.

Who are the invisible people in our lives? The young people and, yes, children in Bangladesh and other places who make the cheap clothing we seek out are invisible to us until a tragedy occurs. The migrant families of Mexico and Honduras who pick our crops are invisible to us until someone advocates for them and raises our attention, however briefly. There are the engine wipers, the agricultural workers, the miners, tin-smiths, tinkers, cobblers, railroad tenders and firemen

who have been automated out of jobs. There are the faceless name tags behind the drive-through window who are sometimes called “the working poor”, people whose skill set is so tiny that they must work minimum wage. Minimum wage is, indeed, minimum, as in “If I could pay you less, I would” but it is not a living wage. We tolerate this by making these people invisible. Those are the invisible people of our world. They are the ones who pay the price for our comfort. David and Bathsheba conceived a child in their illicit coupling. Neither Bathsheba nor David died on account of it, but the child did. There ain’t no free.

Last week, we spoke of the certainty that things should not be the way they are in the world. The way we can live in a world which has deviated so sharply from God’s plan without losing our minds is to make those who suffer on our account invisible. The Gospel

passage from Luke, which we didn't read, contains a devastating story of a dinner party Jesus attended at the home of a Pharisee.

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment.

You would think, would you not, that such a display would draw the host's attention to her. It did draw his attention, but not to her and it was entirely the wrong reaction:

Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him –

that she is a sinner.”

This woman is beneath his notice. She is one of the invisible people, the marginalized, the despised. Jesus refuses to permit such a marginalization of one of God’s children.

Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.”

Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

What Jesus did was shocking to his host for two reasons. First, He made the woman visible. To the host,

the woman's "sins", whatever they may have been, had made her beneath notice. Jesus raised her to visibility. Secondly, the tenor of the times required religious men to distance themselves from sinners, particularly female sinners. I suspect that is why He was invited to supper in the first place. The Pharisee acknowledged him to be a religious man, and His attendance at table gives the host the imprimatur of Jesus' approval. But Jesus taught them that conformity to a sick system is still sickness.

God made no invisible people and there is no free lunch. The sins of David and Ahab and Jezebel began by allowing their power and wealth to blind them to these two indisputable truths, but they ended by David and Ahab confessing their guilt. We, who live lives of plenty provided by those of God's children to which we have blinded ourselves owe it to them, and to our God, to increase our awareness, to be cognizant of those who



suffer while we live lives of comfort. That increased awareness begins with confession. Confessing and acknowledging our sin is the great anodyne to our tendency to view ourselves as righteous. Confession is the beginning of justification – entering into a right relationship with God. It is this truth which leads us to begin our worship today with these words from Psalm 32

<sup>1</sup>Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven,  
and whose sin is put away!

<sup>2</sup>Happy are they to whom the LORD imputes no guilt,  
and in whose spirit there is no guile!

<sup>3</sup>While I held my tongue, my bones withered away,  
because of my groaning all day long.

<sup>4</sup>For your hand was heavy upon me day and night;  
my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.

<sup>5</sup>Then I acknowledged my sin to you,  
and did not conceal my guilt.

<sup>6</sup>I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.”  
Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.

Forgiveness cannot happen without confession.  
Confession cannot happen without awareness that God

made no invisible people. It is only our blindness which makes them so.

AMEN

*Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.*

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