**Family Service Talk 17th July 2022**

**1 Samuel 25:1-34**

***25 Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah. Then David moved down into the Desert of Paran.***

***2 A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel. 3 His name was Nabal and his wife’s name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband was surly and mean in his dealings—he was a Calebite.***

***4 While David was in the wilderness, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep. 5 So he sent ten young men and said to them, “Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name. 6 Say to him: ‘Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours!***

***7 “‘Now I hear that it is sheep-shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not mistreat them, and the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing. 8 Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore, be favorable toward my men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them.’”***

***9 When David’s men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David’s name. Then they waited.***

***10 Nabal answered David’s servants, “Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. 11 Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?”***

***12 David’s men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word. 13 David said to his men, “Each of you strap on your sword!” So, they did, and David strapped his on as well. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies.***

***14 One of the servants told Abigail, Nabal’s wife, “David sent messengers from the wilderness to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. 15 Yet these men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. 16 Night and day they were a wall around us the whole time we were herding our sheep near them. 17 Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him.”***

***18 Abigail acted quickly. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. 19 Then she told her servants, “Go on ahead; I’ll follow you.” But she did not tell her husband Nabal.***

***20 As she came riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, there were David and his men descending toward her, and she met them. 21 David had just said, “It’s been useless—all my watching over this fellow’s property in the wilderness so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good. 22 May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!”***

***23 When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. 24 She fell at his feet and said: “Pardon your servant, my lord, and let me speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. 25 Please pay no attention, my lord, to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name—his name means Fool, and folly goes with him. And as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my lord sent. 26 And now, my lord, as surely as the Lord your God lives and as you live, since the Lord has kept you from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, may your enemies and all who are intent on harming my lord be like Nabal. 27 And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my lord, be given to the men who follow you.***

***28 “Please forgive your servant’s presumption. The Lord your God will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my lord, because you fight the Lord’s battles, and no wrongdoing will be found in you as long as you live. 29 Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my lord will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the Lord your God, but the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling. 30 When the Lord has fulfilled for my lord every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him ruler over Israel, 31 my lord will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the Lord your God has brought my lord success, remember your servant.”***

***32 David said to Abigail, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. 33 May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. 34 Otherwise, as surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak.”***

As in so many good stories, the story you have just heard from the 1st book of Samuel has a cast, all of whom have a vital role in the action. Some speak, others are spoken of and one influences the story but is not mentioned in the passage.

In order to fully understand what God is saying through this passage, we need to meet the cast and, in so doing, set the scene for the action that unfolds.

Firstly, there was Samuel, the spiritual leader in Israel for many years. As God’s faithful servant his role was to try to lead the Israelites in obedience to God. His death at the start of the passage meant a loss of spiritual leadership for God’s people…. no wonder the whole country was in mourning for him.

Next, there was David, already anointed by Samuel as God’s choice to be the next King of Israel, he was a man who worshipped and trusted God fully. He was already successfully fighting against Israel’s enemies but the current king was following him everywhere, determined to track him down and kill him.

3rd on the cast list was the current king, Saul, who had not obeyed and trusted God and had therefore not been successful in his reign. He was insanely jealous of David and was desperate to get rid of him.

Next there was Nabal, a very prosperous businessman with three thousand sheep and one thousand goats. He is described as surly and mean and his name means ‘fool’.

Then there is an unnamed hero – one of Nabal’s servants who plays a vital role

Finally, there is Abigail, Nabal’s wife who is described as beautiful, intelligent, wise and above all is God’s peacemaker.

This cast assembles, along with various servants, sheepshearers and 600 of David’s fighting men in the Desert of Paran. There David and his men are hiding from Saul, Nabal and Abigail are living in Maon and the sheep-shearers are busy shearing sheep in Carmel.

And so, the scene is set …. for David to send servants to ask, very politely, if Nabal would give them food and drink for his 600 men. This seems to us to be an enormous favour to ask of anyone – it would be an awful lot of hotdogs or burgers or in those days in that country probably spit-roast sheep and pitta bread. However, before we laugh, we must remember that ….

1. David’s men had been helping to protect Nabal’s sheep. 2. Nabal was very rich. 3. In that society, custom demanded that weary travellers were always given food and drink … however many there were.

But, as we heard, Nabal’s response was the opposite of what custom demanded and maybe more in line with the ‘mean and surly man’ the Bible describes him as being. He refused the request and sent David’s men packing. They returned to David with the news that there would be no food from Nabal – a bitter blow to this army who were in hiding between battles and totally reliant on provisions from those who live nearby.

Arriving back at David’s hideout, they reported back on their conversation with Nabal. Without thought, and certainly without reference to God, David commanded 400 of his men to strap on their swords and go with him to find Nabal. A situation that was not going to end well …. As David travelled his anger grew and he swore to kill Nabal and all his male family and workers. It seems a pretty over the top reaction and certainly a very dangerous one. But aren’t we all like that at times, when our ‘gut reaction’ to something is to lash out either with our tongues or our bodies? Is that really wise, does it ever bring the desired outcome? In David’s case, it may be that hunger (and the anxiety of having 600 hungry mouths to feed) exaggerated his response but how much better it would have been to think first and to ask God what the best course of action should be.

At this point an unsung hero entered the scene, a very wise (and probably very scared) member of Nabal’s household. A lowly servant who must have felt that he was risking his life in talking to the boss’s wife, but who knew that he had to do something to put the situation right if they were not all going to perish at David’s hands. He very wisely went to Abigail rather than Nabal! And what did he do…. He came clean with Abigail about what her husband had said. He clearly summed up the situation and thus Abigail was able to see what she must do next. It is always good to calmly look at the whole picture before deciding the way forward.

And God guided Abigail, giving her words and actions that would bring peace into this clearly disastrous potential confrontation. She did not know how she would be received but, as she spoke, she trusted God. And she certainly knew the value of actions as well as words. The first thing she did was to send food and drink on ahead so that before she had even met David, he knew that she was wanting to help. She also knew the value of non-actions …. She didn’t mention anything to Nabal of what she was going to do before she left. And as she saw David ahead, she immediately dismounted and bowed low showing clearly her respect and loyalty to God’s chosen king.

Only after all these actions that held out a hand of peace and friendship did Abigail speak with words of respect for David and reverence for God whose plan for saving David was clear to her, if not yet to David. She reminded David that he knew he could trust God in everything, that God had already chosen him to be king and that God would keep him safe. Abigail didn’t really tell David anything he didn’t already know but she calmly and clearly reminded him that on God’s side he had nothing to fear – it was not for him to seek revenge. *(‘Vengeance is mine… says the Lord’*. *Romans 12:19*)

Finally, after the food was handed over underlining the integrity of her words, she asked David to remember her … throughout, she had put her own needs last.

David’s response showed clearly that he had listened to all that Abigail had said because his whole focus changed. Straight away he praised God for sending Abigail to prevent the violence and mayhem that would have resulted and then blessed her for her actions and words. And, reading on, we discover that, having accepted the words, David sent Abigail home in peace.

Once home, Abigail found Nabal very drunk and so she wisely waited until morning to tell him what she had done. Nabal promptly collapsed with a heart attack and died ten days later.

True to his promise, David did remember Abigail …. sending for her to come and be his wife. And so, she did …. Yes, she was beautiful, intelligent, wise and Godly, but I am sure that David also saw in Abigail an inner calm and peace given by God to enable her to bring peace into this potentially disastrous situation.

And what can we learn from this story in those times when we are called to bring peace into a situation….?

1. That often our actions (and non-actions) can diffuse a situation in order that our words are then heard and acted on. 2. A few wise words, calmly spoken, will point to the path of peace

3. We too know we can trust God and we can therefore point people to faith in God through our actions and our words which, by his grace and mercy, can bring lasting peace to all who believe.

Let us thank God for the example of Abigail and pray that, as we trust in Him, God will guide us in the ways of peace.