



*Elijah Confronts Jezebel and Ahab* by Frederic Leighton

My mother tells me that one of my relatives who went home to be with the Lord a number of years ago was the mother of seven children. And in order to keep some discipline in this house full of children, this cousin of mine would keep a list of all the misbehavior of each child until the point when she had at least one black mark against all seven names on her list. Then, she would line them up and paddle them all at the same time. Can you imagine the pressure on that last child to continue living a blameless life in order that all seven children could avoid for just a little longer the heavy hand of justice?

And Mom also tells me that another kind of unique justice ruled in her house when she was a child. You see, my grandfather presided at the bench of the Seventh Judicial Circuit in South Carolina for many years, and he knew a thing or two about how to hand down a sentence. And if my mother did something wrong, my grandfather would make her go out into the woods behind

their house and pick her own switch. And if the switch that my mother brought back wasn't big enough, Granddaddy would send her right back out again to pick another one. Now, that's what I call meaningful discipline, a very well thought out kind of justice! The Collect this morning talks about compassion and justice. And those are really the key elements that tie all of this morning's readings together.

Priests have a habit of repeating themselves with regard to some of the truths that are particularly important in their own lives, and I am no exception. So, one of the things that you're likely to hear me repeat if you stay around me long enough is this: Show me a man's methods and I'll show you his motives....Show me a man's methods, and I'll show you his motives.

That's really what's going on in the Old Testament reading for this morning. If you read about Ahab's initial offer for Naboth's land, it sounds pretty reasonable, right? But let's look a little more closely at what's really going on here. In this morning's lesson from the end of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings, Ahab the King of Israel offers to give Naboth another vineyard, a better one in exchange for the vineyard that borders the King's land. Or otherwise, he says to Naboth, "I'll buy it from you." In effect, Ahab is saying to Naboth, "Go ahead, name your price." Sounds reasonably generous, doesn't it?

But you see, what Ahab was trying to get Naboth to do was against God's law. Because God had specifically told the Israelites that this land was God's land. It wasn't Naboth's to sell, and it certainly wasn't for Ahab to buy. It was part of the Covenant God had made with the Israelites, and for an Israelite to part with ancestral land was a sin against God (see Lev.25:23). And Ahab knew this. Everybody in Israel knew this.

So what Ahab was trying to arrange here was a betrayal of the Lord God. And of course we see in this account from 1<sup>st</sup> Kings just what kind of scheming, selfish, people Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel were. It becomes clear that their motives are anything but honorable. Yes, show me a man's methods, and I'll show you his motives.

Maybe, deep down that's why so many people are worried about what's going on in Washington right now. If our government does so very many things which are hidden from public scrutiny, if so much of what is going on in the corridors of power today is carried out with the absence of appropriate over-sight, then don't we need to be concerned about what the real objectives are?

If the methods which we employ as a country do not present a model of lawful righteousness and justice to the rest of the world, then how can we be sure that what we're striving for is either righteous or just? Show me a nation's methods and I'll show you a nation's motives.

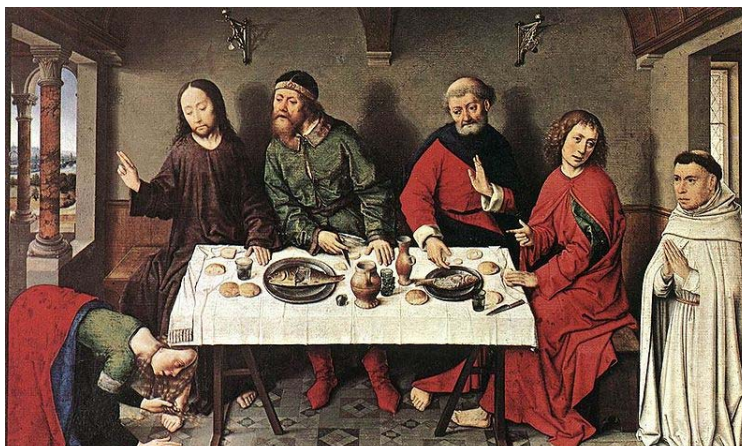
This truth behind the methods and motives of people is wonderfully depicted in the Gospel passage from Luke 7. Here we meet the woman of many tears. This woman had been convicted of something. She had begun to feel a deep need for repentance for some terrible wrong that she had done. She was going through painful remorse for some act of brokenness where she had probably deeply wounded either herself or others. And so she was humbling herself and enacting this sacrifice of repentance in the only way she knew how, by bathing her Lord's feet with her perfumed hands and drying those feet with her hair.

But Simon the Pharisee wasn't buying this. It wasn't his place to lower himself to break bread with the likes of this sinner. Far be it from Simon to humble himself, and welcome these "unclean," "impure" folks into his home or to treat them with compassion. And so this Pharisee continues in his journey through this life with his heart hardened and his nose in the air, completely blind to the needs of those around him, and blind to his own need for humbling, remorse, and repentance. No, there will be no change of life for this particular man of means. You have to admit your need for forgiveness before you can find redemption. But for this man, there would be no change of heart. For he would not come to the place of many tears.

This change of heart is what Paul is talking about in the Epistle from Galatians this morning when he says that for the believer, for the man or woman who has let his pride and selfishness be crucified by the Cross of Christ, then "I no longer live but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal.2:20). But if that's true, then if my life **doesn't** exhibit this kind of change of course, if people don't actually notice in me a sense of humility, and compassion, a thirst for what is right, and loving, and true – if my life doesn't exemplify these things, can I truly be living that life for Jesus Christ? If my actions don't correspond to the humble, patient, charitable models of Christian faith, then how can I possibly profess to be The Lord's servant? If Christ really does live in me, shouldn't that be clear for all the world to see, if I am truly His? Shouldn't my methods match my motives?

So, good people, in your own journey through this world, have you come to the place of many tears? Do you need to consider what kind of testimony your life is to those around you – are you witnessing in word and deed to the presence of The Lord Jesus in your life? When people spend an hour in your presence, do they know that they have also been in the company of The Lord? Have you come to the place of many tears and begun to understand the immensity of Christ's sacrifice and compassion? Have you let your pride be broken and your heart humbled? Do you truly dwell in Christ and He in you? That is my prayer for us all today.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen. JWB+ 04-13-16



*Jesus in the House of Simon the Pharisee* by Deiric Bouts (1440s)