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Faith Des Peres Presbyterian Church
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1 Kings 21:1-10 (11-14), 15-21a
Luke 7:36-8:3

“The Love of Power and the Power of Love”

Imagine inviting yourself to dinner with 30 families . . . in 24 countries. Imagine shopping, farming, cooking and eating with those families, taking note of every vegetable peeled, every beverage poured and every product opened. That's what photographer Peter Menzel and writer Faith D'Aluisio did for their book Hungry Planet: What the World Eats.

The husband-and-wife team wanted to see how globalization, migration and rising affluence are affecting the diets of communities around the globe.

Each chapter of their book features a portrait of a family, photographed alongside a week's worth of groceries. There's also a detailed list of all the food and the total cost.

In the book we meet:

- Poland
- Kuwait City (corn flakes and ritz crackers)
- Japan
- US
- China (urban v. rural)
- Bhutan (so many people, so little food)

Tell the story of the woman in Chad.

I doubt any of us can imagine what that life is like. It's hard to imagine existing on so little food, or rummaging through the sand for one grain of wheat as she's pictured here doing. We go to Schnucks or Dierbergs or Shop N Save, maybe even Straub's or Whole Foods or Trader Joes . . .the aisles are packed with food. The average grocery store sells over 40,000 different items.

But what about the people in our own communities of Kirkwood, St. Louis, Ballwin, even Chesterfield who shop at those stores but are barely getting by? What does the picture look like for them? What's on their dinner tables? These are the people we're trying to help with the produce from our garden. And while the produce might not feed huge number of families, it will help some. Every lit bit counts. Every little bit helps.

It goes without saying that we're called to do our part to help alleviate hunger. Jesus told his disciples to feed the hungry. You can't get more plain spoken than that. We have a responsibility, as followers of Christ, to do something about hunger. Jesus is very clear,

and the Bible is very clear, that we have a responsibility to care for the poor, the hungry, the down-trodden, and the powerless.

Now, there are many ways the Bible gets this message across. Laws, commandments, parables, teachings, and lectures are just a few of the ways this message is told. But one of the best ways this message is proclaimed is through stories, and today we get a really good one about how not to behave in the story of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel.

King Ahab was the king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel from 869-850. He's described in 1 Kings as being the worst of the bunch. He did more evil than all the kings before him and all the kings after him.

Ahab was married to Jezebel. Jezebel worshipped the god Baal, who was a Canaanite god. Baal, ironically enough on this day we're dedicating our garden, was an agricultural god who was the giver of the rain that ensured a successful crop.

But as we know, God doesn't want us worshipping any other gods. What is the 1st commandment? *I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me.* Jezebel, however, doesn't care. She's as evil as Ahab. Perhaps even more evil if that's possible.

God, knowing that there are people like Ahab and Jezebel on the loose, employs prophets to keep the people on the straight and honest. So enter Elijah, the prophet of God. As you can imagine, Ahab and Elijah don't exactly see eye to eye. They are continually at odds with one another.

When we meet up with our trio today, Ahab and Jezebel are vacationing at their summer home, a beautiful palace in Samaria. It so happens that their neighbor Naboth owns a lovely vineyard. One day Ahab approaches Naboth to inquire about purchasing the vineyard. Ahab wants to plant a vegetable garden. He offers to give Naboth a better vineyard or its value in money in exchange for the land. That seems like a good and honest deal, right?

But Naboth says, "No deal. This is the Lord's land", Naboth says. "You know I can't give it to you."

What Naboth is saying here is that, essentially, the land isn't his to give. It's God's land and religious law forbids him from selling the land. But as we know, Ahab doesn't give two hoots about God and God's laws, so he asks him anyway, putting Naboth in the uncomfortable position of telling his King that he can't have what he wants.

As you know, Ahab doesn't react well to Naboth declining his offer, no matter what the reason is. So, like a child who can't have the cookie, he goes home sulking and pouting.

Jezebel, who finds him face down on his bed pouting, basically tells him to man up. "Who's in charge here," she asks. "You, or Naboth? I'll get you your vineyard."

And that she does. She brings trumped up charges against Naboth, claiming that he cursed God (a God she doesn't even worship) and the king. Such a charge results in death. Naboth is proclaimed guilty on the spot and is taken outside and stoned to death.

When Jezebel and Ahab get word of Naboth's death, Ahab takes his trowel and shovel down to Naboth's place and begins planting his vegetable.

But before he gets the seeds in the ground, he meets Elijah. Yes, Elijah got word of Naboth's death, too. But Elijah got word of it from God, who has a little message for Ahab. "Have you found me, O my enemy?" Ahab asks Elijah. "Yeah, I have," Elijah says. "And the evil you've done will bring disaster."

Do you know what happens to Ahab? *Despite a cowardly attempt on the battlefield to disguise, he's struck by an arrow. He suffers for hours, propped up in his chariot, before he finally dies.*

Jezebel meets a worse fate. Tell her story.

The Bible has many ways of getting its message across. Laws, commandments, parables teachings, and-of course stories. And sometimes the stories, like this one, are illustrative of what we should not do.

Now, I realize that all of us here are good and decent people. If you weren't, you wouldn't be here. I know no one here has ever had their neighbor stoned to death because they didn't get what they wanted. That's not to say we always see eye to eye with our neighbors (I can think of a few quirky neighbors I've had), but it's doubtful we've stooped as low as Ahab and Jezebel.

No, I think our sins are more subtle. Our sins may not be sins of commission as much as they are sins of omission. You see, sometimes we do bad things by what we do, and sometimes we contribute to bad things by what we don't do. For example, if Elijah had failed to confront Ahab and Jezebel, he would have been seen by God as complicit to their actions. In ancient Israel, the prophets were there to point out the bad things people to do *as well as* the things they don't do. People didn't have a choice as to whether they should or should protect the widow, orphan, and resident alien (Biblical code words for people who are powerless-modern day equivalents would be the homeless, children, and the hungry). They had to help them and protect them. As followers of the prophetic tradition, feeding the hungry is a mandate-not a choice.

We have everything we need to end world hunger. It would take \$13 billion a year. That's not even 3% of our defense budget.

Art Simon was once a parish pastor in a little church on the lower east side of New York City. Every day hungry people came to his door, and the congregation tried hard to give food to those who came. He knew churches had raised millions of dollars to feed the

hungry, but he also knew that one bill passed by Congress could allocate billions of dollars to feed the hungry. So thirty-five years ago, Art Simon founded Bread for the World, a Christian citizens' lobbying organization. He made the case for political advocacy. "Each of us helps to decide how our nation should use its power and wealth in a hungry world," he said. "Each of us."

We have a choice: we can either do something about hunger (which we're trying to do with the garden or the food we collect for Food Outreach) or we can do nothing and passively contribute to the problem.

As I said earlier, last Tuesday our dog Jezebel died. She was a beautiful dog on both the outside and the inside. I'm proud to say she was nothing like the Jezebel of the Bible. She was loyal, affectionate, and loved to lick your face if you got close enough to hers.

In her old age, she did some things we didn't particularly like. She chewed the kids' toys; she snapped if a child accidentally stepped on her (which can happen with small kids in the house), she barked in the middle of the night to go outside, and then she barked in the middle of the night for no apparent reason. She stopped getting out of the way of the vacuum a few years ago-it was too hard for her to get up; plus, she could no longer hear it so it didn't bother her. She would sleep right in the middle of the hallway, so we were always stepping over her or, as in the case of Charlotte, around her-because she was too big for Charlotte to step over.

When we got home from the circus on Tuesday night and found her, my first thought was, "I didn't love her enough". Someone once said, "I wish I were the person my dog thinks I am," a true statement if there ever was one. If I ignored Jezebel, she loved me; if I forgot to feed her, she loved me; if I didn't have time to play with her, she loved me. No matter what I did, or did not do, she was always there when I walked through the door, eagerly waiting for me-even up until the end.

I once said in a sermon many years ago, that there's a reason the word "dog" is God spelled backwards. I think God wants us to be the person our dogs think we are. God wants us to provide care a protection for those who aren't able to care and protect themselves. God wants us to feed the hungry, and God gives us everything we need to do just that.

God even sets a table for us and feeds us so that we may have the strength and stamina to watch out for one another and the beautiful world in which we live. God gives us all we need and feeds us in a way that no one else can so that we can be the people God calls us to be.

Amen.

