

“Never Stumble Over Something Behind You”

**Luke 9:57-62
First Samuel 25
October 5, 2008**

First Samuel chapter 25 tells an interesting story about a guy named Nabal, a very rich man, his wife Abigail, and David.

David had apparently protected Nabal's shepherds and stock. David sent a message to Nabal, “your shepherds have been with us and we did not harm them. And nothing was stolen from them. Just ask them and they will tell you.” Also, “please receive us ... and give us what you can.”

Nabal says – who is this guy David? I've never heard of him. There are all kinds of thieves out there. For all I know he is one of them, and I'm not sending him anything.

Since David had protected Nabal's men and animals, he was offended by Nabal's refusal of his request. He armed 400 men and set out to kill Nabal. “This is how he pays me back.” One of Nabal's servants told Abigail, his wife, what David was planning. And about Nabal's refusal of David's request. So she gathered up all kinds of food and gifts, and without saying anything to her husband – set out with the gifts to David's camp. She thought she would make things right.

Abigail begged David to drop the matter, saying that her husband Nabal was just living up to what his name meant - a fool. She told David that she knew he would someday be a great king – and to not let her husband's actions cause him to do something would be sorry for later.

What was done was done. It couldn't be changed. There was no need to sacrifice his future for what could not be changed.

NEVER STUMBLE OVER SOMETHING BEHIND YOU.

In a strange way, it sounds like a familiar story. How frequently the things that are behind us, that should be left behind, shape the way the present is.

What would David have said to justify killing hundreds of people over a little lack of courtesy? He would need some excuse. But it would be something terrible that would hang over him for the rest of his life.

Jesus asked people to follow him, but they had their excuses. Let me go bury my father, let me go say goodbye to my family. What are our excuses for not getting on with life, and with God's call on our life?

These were good, rational, valid excuses. And we too have valid excuses for all kind of things. Then there are some too that do nothing but stand in the way of us getting to the abundant life that God has in mind for us. It is easy to criticize the ones who made these excuses. But we know we all have 1000 reasons for not taking care of business.

GIVE UP THE GUILT

EVERYBODY USED TO BE SOMETHING. The Christian faith is all about a new life, and new beginnings. The heart of it all is about having faith to accept the forgiveness offered in Jesus Christ by God our father – and stepping out into a whole new life.

In the invitation to the Lord's Table, we are asked – you who intend to lead a new life ... not – you who are spotless and lilly white in your past.

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Just recently I had someone ask, how do I really know God has forgiven me. One of my answers to that is – have you taken a step of faith to believe what God says about your forgiveness and FORGIVEN YOURSELF?

This is at the heart of the message of our faith. This is our faith response to Jesus. It's disheartening to remember times in my life when I have seen the church act differently. Out of our need to maintain order/discipline in the church, or whatever our excuse, we have said to people – you can't sing in the choir because you have a criminal record, or you can't be an officer in the church because you work as an alcohol distributor, or you can't be married in our church because you have been married before.

Remember how we used to refer to people as “damaged goods?” Because of something in their past? What Jesus did on the cross for us puts our past behind and gives us new life. A clean slate. But somehow we DECIDE to carry a guilt for years or a lifetime over something that is behind us.

A guy in my first church carried guilt for his whole life over something he did when he was like 19 or 20. Even though he was in the church every time the door was open, he spent his whole life stumbling over something that was decades behind him.

TAKE ON RESPONSIBILITY

One of the biggest lessons needed to be learned in our day is taking charge of our lives. I remember a news scene one time with a guy in trouble with the law, laying in the street, shouting that society had failed him. Society owes us nothing.

NEVER STUMBLE OVER SOMETHING BEHIND YOU.

We have a tendency to blame something else, or someone else, for problems in our lives. “I can't because of this ...” or “It's some other person's fault ...” . You don't know what happened to me one time. You don't know what someone said to me or did to me. Well, when I was a kid

One time Peter had observed a conversation between Jesus and John. Thinking he was getting cut out, he was giving Jesus a hard time. Jesus finally turned to him and said, “What is that to you? Follow me.”

NEVER STUMBLE OVER SOMETHING BEHIND YOU, OR SOMETHING YOU HAVE NO SAY OVER.

We give other people control of our lives when we react to the things they say or do. David reacted to a lack of courtesy on Nabal's part and was going to kill him. Huh? We will say that someone said something or did something that hurt us – rather than decide to take responsibility for our own emotions. We choose to react to what someone says or does. They can't hurt us or make us anything.

Watch a basketball game sometime. Two teams are playing. The referee blows his whistle over something he decides is an infraction. One side of the gym goes nuts and starts throwing things out of the stands, calling him all kinds of horrible names, offering him their glasses. Across the way on the other side of the gym, people are cheering and applauding because he has made the right call. Tell me – how on earth did one person cause such opposite reactions on those two opposing sides of the gym? He didn't. Each side chose the way they would react.

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