

NABAL, THE FOOLISH AND ABIGAIL THE WISE

Do you recall the story of Abigail, the wise in I Samuel: 25? Abigail whose surly, ill-tempered husband, Nabal, a rich rancher had needlessly, senselessly, stupidly insulted the one man he ought to have thanked, namely David, soon to be king. David, who had spend months-protecting Nabal and his ranch from rustlers. So, David being extremely angry with this dolt, this dingaling, mad enough to wring his neck. Poor Abigail, the dummy's wife rushes out to save the situation, and says to David, pleading for her husband's life, "Remember, sire, Nabal is his name, and Nabal he will remain." And Nabal in Hebrew means fool. Fool is his name and she was a realist and fool he will remain. When the exasperated woman finally got Nabal off the hook (for David was going to kill him.) and got back home, she at least found him, (the turkey as our children would say) in a pleasant mood for a change. He was "drunk" says the text – trying to forget the fiasco he had made of the day. "Oh, Nabal is his name," she mutters again, "and Nabal he will remain." Well, he suffered a stroke that night and died. Ten days later, poor, old, old Nabal. You see, in the Old Testament, at least, the fool always gets his just deserts. And so do the wise. For example, in this little 1000 BC romance, you don't hear any wails out of Abigail when Nabal dies. She's nobody fool. She's wise. She married Prince David. David, whom she charmed in the _____ interview and she lives more or less happy ever after. Good for her and "bully for the Old Testament" where things work out right – for a change!

Some years ago, I was listing for an adult church school class the characteristics of the fool in the Old Testament: According to the Book of Proverbs, I said, "the fool may be good-looking, but is gullible, good-for-nothing, garrulous, quarrelsome, bad-tempered, hates to be corrected, and never learns except the hard way. When I had finished that list, I heard a little woman in the front row say, out loud to herself, "and to think I had to go and marry him!" That was twenty years ago and I'm happy to report that like Abigail, she did better the second time around.

Truth is, most of us would rather be called most anything than "a fool." For example, if someone says, "You old sinner you!" We may well wink back, put on a raffish look, and say, "You're another!" For the word sin has lost its sting. We don't take it seriously. But when someone calls us "a stupid fool," we know we're insulted. For the word "fool" has fully recovered from its medieval use as "court jester," so that when someone names me a "Nabal"

today, a fool (I do not think he means I am a humorist, or a comedian, even a clown, I think he means precisely what the Book of Proverbs, what the whole Bible, what Jesus in the Gospels means by it: that I am lacking in good sense and Godly wisdom, that my ideas are stupid, my attitudes silly, my behavior self-defeating. In short, I'm seriously insulted. I'm not just a "sinner," you see – I'm a dum-dum. And that gets me where it hurts the most: right in the middle of my over-puffed self-image. It stings my precious ego.

You see, I can preserve my pride and say, "I don't believe in God, and, therefore, imagine I can sneeze at "sin," but it is much more difficult to keep my ego in tact and admit I'm a silly and don't believe in good sense.

So St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians (5:15-17), "Be ye not foolish, "and that gets them, for no one deliberately wants to play the fool. Then he tells them where true wisdom, good sense, comes from: "Understand what the will of the Lord is." In short, God's will makes plain good sense. To illustrate this, Jesus told parables. Do you remember the one he told about Nabal – the fool – the dummy – who was intent on accumulating nothing in this life, but money? The one whose idea of happiness had nothing to do with loving his family, or being loyal to his friends, and who wasn't thankful for anything but profit, and who said to himself, "I will build bigger barns," remember him? Jesus did not call him "sinner," did he? He simply said, "thou fool" (dum-dum) – this night your life will be over, and you've never really lived it man, never understood what it was all about, never experienced love and loyalty, never felt the joy of generosity, so intent you were in building bigger barns – "ah, thou fool" (thou silly!).

And what about Jesus' parable of the five bridesmaids? The ones who faced unprepared an unpredictable future? Remember them? And what did Jesus call them? "Wicked?" No. "Just plain foolish," he called them. Very silly. A pack of Nabal-enes, dummies.

Therefore, if you ever wonder about the rightness – or the wrongness – of some of your ideas, or some of you attitudes, or some of you actions – a good first question (not last) to ask yourself is, "Is it silly?" Before you lose your integrity, use your intelligence. It's a most religious thing to do. To ask yourself, "Am I about to play the fool?" An honest answer to that is often quite helpful. Most of us know well enough when we're about to be stupid.

But, if you can not honestly answer that question, "Am I about to be another Nabal?" – if you don't know, or don't care, then there must be something seriously lacking in you. Maybe its

lack of experience or intelligence. Or maybe it's something else. Maybe it's what the New Testament calls "the wisdom that cometh from God." Maybe it's the old God that missing in your heart.

The 14th psalmist it was who wrote: "The fool says in his heart, there is no God." (Ps. 14:1)

"No God" – no God at the heart of us? At the core of us? May be that is why we so often play the fool. For "God is love," says the NT – and when you come right down to it, the only explanation for most of our "tom-foolery," most of our senseless, stupid folly, that tortures, twists life all out of shape, is our lack of love, at the heart of us. Isn't this what St. Augustine meant by saying, "Love God and do as you please"? For if you know what love is, if you're kind at the heart of you adding to the hurt of the world will never please you; only adding to the help of it will be your pleasure.

So the fool, (who) says in his heart, "There is not God," is foolish, indeed, for at the heart of his being, he doesn't believe in kindness. He doesn't believe in love, for that's the wisdom that comes from God. So, he's in trouble. And he brings trouble with him.

It's no small wonder, therefore, Jesus cautioned his disciples to call a man "fool." It's a serious charge; it's damning to say a man is totally lacking in concern at the heart of him. Besides, no one knows this about another, only God, and oneself. So maybe it is better just to pray and say, "O Lord, let me never play the fool but quitting my ability to love, to care, and be kind, to all kinds, as long as I last. In this way, let me be like the Christ I confess. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.