

# Hopkins South Monterey

## United Methodist Church

Affecting Lives Through Jesus Christ

Scripture & Sermon

June 6, 2021

Pastor Kelsey

### 1 Samuel 8:4-20, 11:14-15

4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, 5 and said to him, "You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations." 6 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to govern us." Samuel prayed to the Lord, 7 and the Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. 8 Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. 9 Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."

10 So Samuel reported all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. 11 He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; 12 and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. 13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. 15 He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. 16 He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. 17 He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. 18 And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day."

19 But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, "No! but we are determined to have a king over us, 20 so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles."

11:14 Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship." 15 So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. There they sacrificed offerings of well-being before the Lord, and there Saul and all the Israelites rejoiced greatly.

## Prayer & Sermon

*God of love and grace,*

*Thank you for this time to be together. Thank you for this time with you. Bless this time we have to spend with your Word. Help us to hear what you know we need to hear, and help us to put what we learn about you and ourselves into action. In the name of the Son and Spirit, Amen.*

This week we are starting a five week series using the Lectionary's suggested texts in 1 and 2 Samuel. The series theme is God at Work and throughout we will hear about God's grace at work in unexpected ways and the ways God actively works among God's people. Since we focused on Trinity Sunday last week, we missed the first part of the series, which told of God calling Samuel to be a leader of the Israelites and a mediator between God and the people. That story of 1 Samuel 3 reminds us that one of the ways God is at work is through calling us into where we can have a part in building God's Kingdom.

This week, we read in chapter 8 and the result in chapter 11 a part of the story that reminds us that God responds. The story shared in the collection of verses we read this morning tells of the Israelites asking Samuel to appoint a King to rule them, Samuel isn't sure about it and prays about the request. God tells Samuel that it isn't a good idea, so Samuel shares what God told him with the people, but they still insist, so God accepted their choice and told Samuel who to appoint King.

The plot is basic enough, but it has some important things to say. First, it is helpful to understand who Samuel is. You are probably familiar of his name and maybe some of his major stories, but I find it is also easy to mix up people in the Old Testament, most of them are men and a lot of them have similar stories. So a quick snapshot biography of who Samuel was: he was a prophet (some argue the first prophet), he was maybe a priest as the Bible references him doing things that only priests were allowed to do, and he was the judge over Israel, which meant he was a leader brought up from the people, seen as inspired by God, and treated as the mediator between the people and God. The Israelites had used this leadership system for many many years before this moment, we can read about most of them in the aptly named book of Judges. That is one of those books in the Bible that it is real easy to skim over or even have skipped entirely, but it tells of the history of the Judges and that time period after arriving in the promised land through a little before Samuel. I took a whole class on it in Seminary to fulfill credit and it turned out to be one of my favorite classes because I learned so much I never would have known to look into before. Anyway, we aren't here to study Judges today, that is for a later time. The thing to know here is that Samuel became a leader through that process and even more specifically because the judge who came before him, Eli, was booted out from the position after trying to give over the leadership to his sons which would have turned the system into a monarchy, and they didn't like that! The irony is that Samuel then tries to do the same with his sons, but the people quickly realize that

Samuel's sons are super corrupt. They were taking bribes and doing injustice. Because of that situation, the Israelites were feeling like they were on unsteady ground internally, within the community. To make matters worse, things weren't looking good externally or looking out either. They continue to lose wars to their neighbors and those other nations are then oppressing them. So they know that things have gotta change, and it is pretty rational that they then look to those nations who keep winning against them and think, we want to live like their people so we need to organize our leadership like those others so we can have someone who will win battles and stimulate the economy and bring our military up to snuff. So the elders go to Samuel, their current leader, and dissing him for his age, they say, you're too old for the job, but could you find us a King? Samuel says, I don't know guys, I'm not sure about that one, and goes to ask God for input. God is real with Samuel. He highlights to Samuel that this is not surprising behavior from the Israelites for them to want to take things into their own hands, but confirms that wanting a King like the other nations is a rejection of God's leadership over them. God brings up the exodus or when the Israelites were brought out of slavery in Egypt, implying that that event should have been proof of God's leadership over God's people, but they have not remembered that history and forget of God's incredible leadership. I hear a bit of tired exasperation in God's voice here, "Yeah Samuel, so they want to replace you with some more "normal" leader. Join the club. This is a classic move by them, they easily forget what we have done for them. But alas. They won't stop pestering you until they have the answer they want. So I recommend that you entertain their request, but give them this warning." Samuel takes God's advice and goes back to the elders who had come to him asking for a king. And Samuel does give them the warning, he says, "If I give you a king this is what God says will happen. The king will draft your son's into the army and take them to war in his new fancy military gear. The king will draft even more men to build his armory and work the fields to supply this great army. oh but he won't stop there he will then take your daughters to be indentured workers in shops and restaurants and bakeries. oh but not just your family members then he will come for your fields and your Vineyards in your Orchards and give them to those in his Royal Court. if that isn't enough then he will take one tenth of your harvest and give that to supply his Royal Court. Then he will take the slaves that work your land and keep your estate running, and then even the livestock that help you work your land and put them to work his own. and even that isn't enough he will take 1/10 of your flocks, taking even more of your resources to be fed and clothed. And then without any of the resources you once had to maintain your livelihood, you will become his slaves. And when that happens you will realize how much you need God's help, But it will take time, to bring the Israelites back from that far gone." Samuel lays it all out for them, and oh are the consequences are steep. God is warning them that those costs of having a King are not worth it, the grass is not greener on the other side. If they get a King, they will not just get the perks, but also the full negative consequences inherent to giving one person total power. And worse yet, this list also implies taking more from them than just people and capital. Not only will a King take from them house, livelihood, family and home, but as is implied by all the mentions of taking 1/10th, God is making reference to how the government will be taking from them what was meant to go to God, which would have been a 1/10th tithe. Poor Samuel has to deliver this bad news! But somehow, the people don't seem bothered. In fact, they reveal even more where their

priorities lie, as once they have the knowledge of all those nasty consequences that will fall upon their loved ones and children, their response still is, "But we want one! We want to be like everyone else! We want to win battles too!" They were so focused on wanting the tangible, powerful, and corruptible leader in a King instead of God who would encourage them to live life differently from all the other nations and instead of comparing to them, could be a blessing to them.

We didn't read the direct response from Samuel or God to this insistence as it spreads out over the following chapters, but we do skip to the end result in chapter 11, verses 14-15: Samuel tells the people, "Alright, alright, let's go instate a king!" So, we know that God heard the people's continued informed requests for a King, and respected their choice and helped them find the best path forward within that choice. God told Samuel to appoint Saul to be King, so Samuel did, and though it started out well, sure enough just under Saul's rule as their first King, all of the things that God told Samuel will happen, came to pass.

This story is a great example, a great glimpse, into the complexities of the dynamic between God's will and human freedom. How does God respond and act among us while also allowing and respecting our gift of Free will? This makes me think of one of my favorite phrases in the Bible, we know that all things work together for good for those who love God. Our God of great grace and love gives us so many chances to get it right and is ready to help us bring about any good when we make mistakes. God gives us the free will to make our own choices, but will always be there to give us advice, to tell us where the best path is, perhaps like with Samuel, to give us a heads up of what could come if we go an unadvised way. God responds to our requests for help. God responds to our decisions with grace. God responds to our mistakes with help. God responds, or is moved and affected by the choices we make. God does not just dictate or puppeteer the world, but brings us into the conversation and responds to the conversation.

Now this doesn't mean that God just gives us whatever we want no matter if it is just us or a whole people group asking. But God does work with us and compromise with the things we decide with our free will and works to make the best out of what we go ahead and do. This is God's grace! God doesn't start the conversation, give us good advice, and then give us the silent treatment if we don't follow it. God doesn't quibble or increase the consequences when we choose the wrong path. God isn't petty like that. God's grace is bigger than all that, God responds to the current situation we have gotten ourselves into and will help us find what we need to make things better or persevere until they do.

This is a hopeful message! We can often be like those elders, desperate to fix a unsteady and scary situation and so move urgently toward what we think is the best choice instead of listening to what ideas God could lead us toward. Our urgency makes it easy for us to fall short in thinking through the possibilities and consequences of them. How can we better keep God's ideas, and God's grace in our scope? How can we keep ourselves focused on those ideas first and foremost instead of repeating mistakes or the brokenness of human systems? Prayer is always important in these moments as it is in prayer we converse with God. The more that we keep God center in our day to day life,

the easier it will be to look to God for big decision moments. Keeping connected to the church family, talking with other Christians about your faith and where you see God in your life, spending time wrestling with your big questions or doubts to seek for God's eady answers, doing devotionals or other ways to hear different perspectives on our faith and God. All of that, and surely more, are ways that we keep God in our line of sight when we look ahead and make decisions. God's response to Samuel and the Israelites through him is a great reminder that God's grace is bigger than our mistakes and that God is glad to extend that grace because God loves to be in relationship with us and longs to respond to us. May we find assurance in that grace and be empowered to bring God into the conversation.

I invite you to join me in an attitude of prayer as I share this litany:

When our hearts are grieving, crying out in distress

The Lord hears our cries.

When our spirits are wandering, lost and afraid

The Lord seeks and finds us.

When our days seem filled with anger and hopelessness

The Lord brings comfort and peace to us.

When we don't think we have anything to offer to God.

God produces miracles in our lives that can serve others.

When we need to know that God is with us.

God is present in all the earth.

For all the ways in which God blesses our lives,

We give thanks and praise!

For the people who have taught and guided us, who have shown us the right paths of God,

We give thanks and praise!

For the wonderful things which we have seen and the things yet to come,

We give thanks and praise to God! AMEN.