

Hillcrest Congregational UCC
Rev. Dr. Loletta M. Barrett
Kingdom Work
June 14, 2009

1 Samuel 15:35 - 16:1-5, 10-13, 2 Cor 5:14-17, Mark 4:26-34

Today we have three scriptures that all have to do with a Kingdom of God. Our reading from first Samuel tells us the story of the identification of David as the future king of Israel. Our second reading from Ezekiel is in the form of poetry, a metaphorical prophecy about the peaceful future of God's kingdom. The third reading is from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians talks about living in the kingdom of God. Our third reading is a parable of Jesus about what the kingdom of Heaven is like.

Some of you are familiar with the Bible and others not so much. Some of the stories are familiar to you from hearing them over and over, and yet others are glossed over. I have had some requests that we spend time delving a little more deeply into scriptures, perhaps looking at one at a time, so that they become easier to understand.

My first suggestion is that we all pull out our Bibles and get a little more familiar with them. The Bible is a rich heritage for us- full of poetry, story, encouragement, practical advice, and even some esoteric knowledge. I know that there are a couple of you who actually bring them to church and that is wonderful. There are also Bibles in some of the pews and I encourage you to open them and read along with our lay leader each Sunday.

Sometimes hearing the words is not enough, sometimes seeing them helps, especially when they are not a story. No matter how many times I read the Bible, no matter how many Bible studies and even seminary classes I have been in, there is always something new to learn, a new perspective on a story, a new piece of information about the people of the time, enlightening interpretation, as Rev. John Robinson preached to the pilgrims of the Mayflower, there is yet more light to be revealed from God's holy word.

Besides being the sacred story of the history of God and God's people, the Bible is sacred because when you pick it up new things are revealed. We learn and relearn the stories, see them in a new light, and then they illuminate things that are going on in our own time- thousands of years later. And sometimes, if we sit with them and really look for the deeper meaning, the jewel buried beneath the jewels, we can see them as a source of wisdom far beyond the daily comings and goings of our lives. The Bible can be a life long treasure hunt for you. I encourage you to come to the Bible study we are beginning and if you cannot, please let me know and we can start one another time, or you and I can discuss other ways you can delve into the sacred mystery.

But today we have a story. I invite you to turn in your Bibles to I Samuel 15 verse 35. page in the pew Bibles. But, whenever we begin reading the scripture, we need to put it in context. We need to know the background, before our reading begins.

Poor Samuel. He is one of God's prophets, one of God's servants poor suffering servants who must watch the people of God crash and burn again and again. You see, the Israelites were not content just being a people. They were not content with the land of milk and honey. In spite of all that they had, in spite of what God had done for them, they were not content with El Shaddai, Elohim, YHWH as their king.

God had called them out of bondage, given them a land, given them peace and prosperity. But no, they wanted to be like all the other people. They wanted a king to lead them. At first God got really mad. God told them no. God told them that God was their king. God told them that they did not need a king, that no human king could ever do for them what God had already done and was continuing to do. God told them they did not need anyone to get in between the people and God. But they were not satisfied and God wants God's people to be happy.

So God gave them a king- Saul. And Samuel was a companion to Saul, trying to help him to be a good king, encouraging him to keep the relationship with God first in his mind, and the minds of the people. But eventually Saul and the people and the country went astray. Sadly, Samuel had to leave them to their own devices. And that is where our reading from I Samuel begins today: I Samuel 15: 35 Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel.

Eventually God knows that the people must have a plan to move on into their future. So God said to Samuel, in verse "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons."

But Samuel has some practical concerns he points out to God. Verse two Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." You see God, if you are human and there is a king, you don't just go around picking out and anointing a new king with oil while the old king is still alive. That can get you executed as a traitor.

So God gives him an out- a little subterfuge on the part of YHWH, pretend to be on a pilgrimage to worship me and I will point out the new guy. "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.'³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you."

When Samuel arrives the elders of the city know what he has come for and they are scared out of their wits. Verse 3-Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" Hey Samuel, what are you doing, trying to start a war? The king will know you are here and will come and wipe us all out!

But Samuel lets them in on the little secret with YHWH- don't worry guys, I got it all covered. ⁵He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

The rest of the story is about the surprise that God has for all of them. They know that one of Jesse's sons is to be anointed to be king- but which one? He has tall sons, strong sons, warrior sons, smart sons, clever sons, grown and read to serve. But verse 10, ¹⁰Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these."

So Samuel asks if there are any other sons, verse 11 "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." So David is sent for and to everyone's surprise, in spite of his youth, it turns out that David is the one chosen by God. Samuel anoints him and God is with David from that day forward.

Now, what can we discern from this scripture? What lesson do you hear? What questions come to you?

Why would God pick a little guy, why would God encourage lying? You might be surprised who God picks. God will pick who God will pick. God empowers those God chooses. If we turn from God, God will do what God can do to get us back on the right path. Nothing is to come between us and God including our pastor. If we don't put God first our country, lives, family suffers. God wants for our good. God wants us to have good leaders.

What about for our interim time?

God does not want us to feel we are without guidance. God allows us to grieve for the time we need to grieve. But does not want us to remain grieving for the past, our past leaders. God will provide, and will help us choose a new leader when it is time. It may not be the leader we now think we need.

The interim time is a sacred time. I am thankful and feel honored and privileged to share this time with you. I am here to empower you all to be like Samuel- to know what is healthy and what is not, to grieve for the time necessary, to listen for God's timing and leading in choosing the one who help lead you in to the future. Can you say- may it be so? Amen? Amen.