

Lent 4, 2008
Good Hope Lutheran Church
1 Samuel 16: 1ff

I'd like to turn back to the Old Testament lesson for today, from 1st Samuel 16. It begins in this way: "The Lord said to Samuel, How long will you grieve over Saul? For I have rejected him as king, and I have provided a ruler for myself, from among the sons of Jesse."

In the name of Jesus Christ+, AMEN.

We turn today to the Old Testament book of First Samuel. To be honest, I'm not always sure a lot of Lutherans even know there is a book of First Samuel, or for that matter Second Samuel. I'm even less convinced many of us know what's in these books. So I encourage you to read them, and the rest of the Old Testament too, for certainly it is still God's Word for us. But for now, let me simply introduce you to a part of First Samuel, and get on with today's message.

You see, for a variety of reasons both good and bad, the people of ancient Israel decided, that they needed a king. They had never had a king before. Instead, as we see in the book of Judges, God had raised up leaders in Israel on an as-needed basis. When there was an emergency of some sort or another, God's Spirit would fill an individual and that individual would provide leadership for the people. No emergency, no need for a leader, and the people all simply "did what was right in their own eyes," after all they had the Law of Moses as a guide.

Well, that was the book of Judges—impromptu leadership, raised up by God, to deal with very temporary, very specific moments of crisis. But now, the book of First Samuel—where for reasons both good and bad the people decided they needed a permanent ruler, they wanted a king like other nations had kings. And, again for reasons both good and bad, Saul had been selected. Saul, King Saul, the first monarch in Israel. We are told that Saul stood a full head taller than anybody else, a warrior, he was big mean ugly and tough. An excellent choice for king. An obvious choice for king, in those difficult, bloody times.

The story of Saul is both interesting and compelling, but I need to get to the point. See, for His own mysterious reasons, the day came when God rejected Saul as king. Saul got a pink slip from

God, you've been laid off by the Lord, don't call us we'll call you, for His own mysterious reasons—God rejected the kingship of Saul. And instead, God chose a son of Jesse, a snot-nosed little kid whose name turned out to be David. And where we pick up the story today, Samuel the prophet has just been told by God, go give Saul the pink slip. “What are you looking at me for?” God said to Samuel. “You're a prophet, it's your job! Give Saul the pink slip already!”

And Samuel, grieved over Saul. Samuel looked back over the years he had known Saul—good times and bad—and he grieved. All the things, that might have been. The choices we'd made together, the work we did together, if only we'd done it a little bit different. If only we'd done it different maybe things would have turned out different, maybe this day would have never come, if. If only. Something I said something I should have said. Something I did something I should have done—Samuel lost some sleep over this one. Tossing and turning in his cot at night, dealing with remorse dealing with regret; wrestling with guilt. The dreams we once dreamed, now certain to never come true. If only. Samuel grieved over Saul, he grieved what might have been.

The Word of God came to Samuel a second time. “How long, will you grieve over Saul. How long will you chain yourself to the past, how long will you eat regret and drink remorse, how long will you try to sleep at night with a guilty conscience? How long till you give up your old dreams, and start dreaming new ones? Behold,” said the Lord, “a new day has come. I have provided for myself a new king,” said the Lord, “one from among the sons of Jesse in Bethlehem. Now go take your horn and fill it with oil and, anoint this little kid for me, ok? David, go anoint David king over Israel, and start dreaming a new dream. Enough with the remorse already! Enough with the regret! For a new day has come.” And Samuel went, and did as God commanded.

The figure who intrigues me in all this of course is Samuel himself—anointer of kings and, bearer of pink slips. Samuel, who grieved over Saul. Now in a way. In a way, he is like the woman at the well last week, right?—a person very much like us, filled with guilt. Mindful of past sins that need to be confessed and forgiven, and past disappointments that need to be released. Kind of the woman at the well, all over again. But there's something else about Samuel,

something besides guilt or disappointment, something that I would term, mid-life crisis. You see, when you grieve the past, in a way you're also grieving the future. Again, you grieve the past, in a sad and strange way you are also grieving the future, all the things that might have been—and now never will be. Choices made, or not made. Roads taken, or not taken. Things could have turned out different, things could have turned out better!—too late now. Too late for those dreams. In a sense, we all grieve over Saul—for days and for people who have come and gone, but more painful still for hopes and dreams that have come and gone. The past is past and in a way, so is the future! Right? So is our carefully constructed vision of the future, it may be gone, and we grieve it.

How long, will you grieve over Saul. Whoever or whatever Saul is for you, how long will you grieve it? How long, God wants to know, will you go on living in the past, mourning an impossible future? You do not have to live with regret anymore. You do not have to live with remorse anymore. There are new dreams, new visions, new hopes and even new happiness. And it's to be found in following the God, who always beckons us forward. The future, belongs to God. His dream of heaven WILL come true. The future belongs to God, and it His gift to you now; and with the gift of the future, comes the gift of today? And all that IT can be, yes?

Behold, says God, I have provided for myself a new king, from among the sons of Jesse. From among the sons of Jesse, the house and lineage of David, God has chosen a King. God has filled His Horn and anointed Him with oil, and this new king from Bethlehem—Jesus, in case you've forgotten the name—this Jesus IS King. This Jesus IS God's new day. And you are now cordially invited to live, in God's new day. You can live and laugh and love and dream again, because of Jesus—King Jesus—who died and rose again. The future is His, and so is today—sleeper awake! Let the light of Christ shine upon you! And may His dream, come true for you forever.

In the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.