

## November 22, 2020 | Journey worship service

THEME: Harvest

TEXT: [1 Samuel 8](#)

By Kathryn Ophardt

Have you ever gone looking for something, thinking that it would solve your problem or satisfy your need, and then realize that what you need is actually something entirely different?

Like sometimes, I think I'm hungry, so I grab a bag of potato chips. I LOVE potato chips! And I live alone, so why get a bowl when a bag is like a really big bowl, right? I can munch away happily for quite some time, but once I lose track of how many times my hand has reached into the bag, I realize that what I really need is water. Yet, even when I realize that I am thirsty, for some reason, my hand keeps gravitating toward a bag of chips. Or sometimes I feel so tired I think I need a nap, but really what I actually need is to get up, move around, stop looking at my computer and see the light of day. Does this kind of thing ever happen to you?

Today we heard a story of Israel choosing the chips over a drink of Living Water. Today we hear a story of the people sleeping instead of opening their eyes to the Light of the World.

In the story we heard today, we drop in before the era of kings over the nation of Israel. Before there were kings, there were judges who God appointed to lead the people. But even as the judges led the people, God reigned over Israel. We have a whole book of the Bible that tells us what life was like under these judges. Honestly, it was a mixed bag. In the book of Judges, there are some hard stories, some brutal stories, and some stories that give us a mirror to the pain that humanity causes one another. In this passage from 1 Samuel, the people express their dissatisfaction with the leadership of the judges, but instead of turning to God as their true leader and guide, they ask for a human king to take God's place as ruler over the nation of Israel. I think this hurt God. God set Israel apart and the Israelites asked to be like the other nations! They didn't want to be God's people, they wanted to be like everyone else. That is like a punch in the gut to God. When Samuel expressed his concerns to God, God responded, "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 their king." *The people rejected God.* How often do we reject God as our true leader and guide?

Since even before the time of Samuel, we have looked for earthly authorities to take control, to protect us, guide us, and fix the problems of our societies. We looked for a king and God said, "*Let me be your king.*" God has offered over and over, "Let me be your father, your mother, your counselor, your shepherd, your friend." But we keep looking for a king.

The people of Israel demanded a king and God said, "you don't want a king. They will take advantage of you and make your lives miserable," but the people kept demanding

a king, even though God was already their leader—their sovereign ruler who loves them, who wants them to have freedom. I don't even think that the Israelites knew that God was their ruler because they kept looking for someone who looked like them. They usurped God's reign and gave it to Saul. And God obliged. God listened to the people. God does not force God's self upon us.

God does not force God's self upon the world, but God keeps showing up to give us the chance to choose God. Throughout scripture, God's people kept looking for a king, and there were more bad kings than there were good ones. And we hear the echoes of God's voice say, "You don't want a king... Let me be your King... but I will listen to you and give you what you ask for."

Then, the days of kings had passed for Israel. They suffered under the empires of Assyria, and then Babylon, and then Persia, and then Greece, and then Rome. The people of Israel kept looking for a king. They kept looking for a king who looked like them. So God listened to the people and God humbled God's self and became truly human. And God walked among them through Jesus the Christ.

On the day we remember as Palm Sunday, the people of God waved their branches and believed they were finally going to get the king they had been praying for all that time. They expected Jesus to end the reign of the Roman Empire and be the King of the Jews! Yet, when Jesus wore the crown of thorns, the people rejected him. Even though Jesus looked like them, he did not look like the king they wanted. And the voice of God echoes on: "Listen to the voice of the people; they have rejected me from being their king."

In contrast from the early Israelites, the people on Palm Sunday were finally ready to ask for their LORD to be their king, but even then, they weren't ready for what Christ's reign would really be. Christ's reign leads us in holy resistance to the systems, institutions, and politics that govern us. Christ reigns with compassion and justice and grace. When we claim Jesus as King, it is not to say that Jesus is just another extension of the patriarchy ruling over our lives. Jesus meets us where we are. Jesus came to us as a king, but also as child, as a sibling, as a teacher, as a healer, and as a friend. Christ relates to us in dozens of ways! My point is that if you embrace God in your life however you relate to God, then I believe that God will meet you there. Maybe God will not come to us in the way we expect, but I really do believe that God meets us where we are and is willing to engage, grow, and be with us in an everlasting covenantal relationship since long before we were born and forever more. To me, that is what Christ the King Sunday means! It means that when Christ ascended into the heavens, Christ did not stop accompanying us. The opposite is true! Now, Jesus doesn't have to choose between being in Jerusalem and Galilee. Christ can hold the whole world in Christ's own hands. The people didn't see how Christ's earthly pacifism could end the rule of Empires over our hearts or how Christ's resurrection would free us from the tyranny of death, or how Christ's ascension would be an invitation to lift our eyes to the heavens and remember with every sunrise and sunset that Christ our King reigns! The Kingdom

of God has already begun! It is not complete, but it has started. So where does your allegiance lie?

Yet, even while God truly reigns, earthly leadership still matters. Leaders on earth can determine what is acceptable in society. Leaders can determine whether people live or die. Leadership determines whether people are oppressed, abused, even killed because of the color of their skin, whether a person's sexual orientation or gender identity determine their rights, or whether asylum seekers remain camped out at the southern border. We have to value good leadership in our communities, nations, and world because they matter, but no matter who they are or what they do, our mayors, our representatives, governors, and presidents are not and can never be God. This means that whoever is in charge, we must be wary of them becoming our idols. They can have our votes, but they cannot have our devotion. That conversation that Samuel had with God in our scripture reading is a conversation that we continue to have today. Are you still looking for an earthly leader or will you let Christ be your guide?

Today is Christ the King Sunday. May Christ transform how we think about leadership and rulers. Today is an invitation to shift our allegiance from the powers that be and look to the true power that is! That reigns! That loves! That waits for us to join in the promises of the life to come and the Kingdom that God is building now! All Glory Be To God. Amen.

Benediction:

May we go forth today, following Christ in Holy Resistance, in compassion and grace, hearing Christ's call to live into the Kingdom of God here and now.