

Sermon June 10, 2018 Let's Have a King...or Not! Cara B. Hochhalter

1 Samuel 8:4-20, 11:14-15 and 2 Corinthians 4:15-5:1

There is an African story where children were asked to race to a tree and the first one there could have the fruit. Turns out, all the children held hands and ran together...and then they *shared* the fruit! When asked why they did this...they said they could not be happy if any of their friends were left out of the prize!

Unfortunately, our country's sense of individual rights, has nurtured a kind of greed and disregard for the good of all.... We've lost our balance, it seems, and we wonder if our leadership cares if so many -- are left out of the prize!

I was pleased to go to the Poor People's Campaign last Monday in Springfield...with John Hoffman and Mary Clare... Kate was there along with about 200 others. While most of the crowd seemed to be white-haired and over 60 like me....the speakers were mostly younger people of color who were part of various organizations working to make life better...One mother cried out for children in schools in Springfield where there is a high amount of mold and children with asthma! The imbalance of wealth in this nation shows up clearly in education and in opportunities for healthcare!

There was a black minister there who looked out at the crowd and said, "If you are here just to make yourselves feel better....go home!" Whoa...how much of my own effort to stand with those who seek a change in our system...is really just to make *me* feel better? It was a tough question!

Let us be in prayer: God of all people, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The African word, *Osani*, from the picture on the cover of your bulletin....means love. It means that loyalty to the group is more important than the success of one individual...it is a focus on doing good for the whole, instead of trying to get for one's self. It is, after all...what Jesus taught...to love one another, to care for the poor, the orphans, the imprisoned...those for whom life has been a tough ride. To not hoard wealth, but to share with others.

Samuel, was a prophet. Remember, as a boy he heard God calling to him and he was urged to say, "Go ahead, God, I am listening!" Now he has grown and the people around him respect this relationship that he has with God. They have lived in tribes

who do not get along so they tell Samuel that they should have a king...like other nations.

Samuel, talks to God who says he must warn them but also listen to them. So he tells them of the dangers of having a king/ruler/president who does not have their best interest at heart; one who may send their young people off to wars they don't believe in or demand too much of their crops for the king's own, imprisoning or making slaves of their people and confiscating land. They are warned and yet they think a king, like other countries have---will be the answer to their problems.

Granted there have been beneficent kings and rulers of nations....but not always.

Jeff and I went to see the Pope the other night...well actually, we saw him in the new movie called, "Pope Francis: A Man of his Word." It is a beautiful film about this revolutionary, religious leader who says things like: "God loves people of all religions."

It is a movie about this Pope's convictions that we are all responsible for the state of our environment, for the poverty and inequality of resources in our world, the plight of refugees, and the destruction of war. He looks us, the viewers, in the eye and says, "We are all responsible." He said this twice even though it was in Italian, I heard it plain and clear---in the subtitle! We are all responsible for our world. While I am so grateful for the goodness of life I cannot be completely happy when I know there is such suffering....not everyone gets the prize....

What made me wonder about Pope Francis, was how he is so adored by throngs of people wherever he goes...thousands of people with beautiful faces all cheering for him...and holding up their babies for blessings and prayers....and yet he maintains humility. He has power that has not gone to his head! With deep spiritual strength, he keeps his conviction to live with simple dignity and compassion.

It was Lord Acton in a letter to a bishop in 1887 who said, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." The more power someone has, the more their moral sense diminishes. This does not seem to be the case for Pope Francis....although it may be the case for other world leaders we know... power can corrupt! And if you elect someone who is corrupt to begin with and give him much power.... we must wonder what responsibility we have for the consequences!

God told Samuel to warn the Israelites so long ago... but they got their king in the person of Saul...and then a whole era of kings did prove to be problematic.

But there have been good leaders. Those who lead for the common good of all and out of a sense of spiritual truth.

The Apostle Paul wrote letters to the Corinthians who had enough corruption to go around. Paul says, however, "We do not lose heart...our inner nature is being renewed day by day...we look not at what can be seen for that is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal."

Paul hints that even in times of hardship, there is an inner wisdom that is renewed through our relationship with God/Christ/Spirit...it is not visible...but it is real.

Mark Elliot writes that if you ask people of faith where God resides, Hindus and Buddhists typically point to their hearts, while Jews, Christians, and Muslims point upwards...to the heavens. I think that Christianity has evolved so that many of us think of Holiness as being deeply within as well as part of everything around us!

Rupert Sheldrake from his book, *The Sense of Being Stared At*, suggests that while some animals have a sixth sense in order to respond to the earth's magnetic fields, humans have a sense that connects us to each other, to the world and to a spiritual dimension..... Good leaders have some sense of Spirit...

I will close with this little story:

"Where shall I find God" a disciple once asked his teacher.

"Here," the teacher said.

"Then why can't I see God?"

"Because you do not look...."

"But must I look in a special kind of way?"

"No, the ordinary way will do."

"But don't I always look the ordinary way?"

"No you don't," the teacher said.

"But why ever not?" the disciple pressed.

"Because to look, you must be here. You're mostly somewhere else." the teacher replied.

A good leader....and all of us, really, do best if we are aware of being where we are...of being here...in this moment and time. I think Pope Francis is trying to show us what is here, around us....both the harm being done to our earth and to our fellow human beings...as well as the joys of compassion, dignity and love.... Pope Francis is trying to show us God...in the midst of it all. While he is not a king...he is an incredible world leader. Amen.