

**WHERE O WHERE IS HE?
1 Samuel 15:34-16:13
John 6:15
Preached by Dr. Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
Sunday, June 17, 2012**

When Jesus realized they were coming to take him by force and make him their king, he withdrew again to the mountain to be by himself. (John 6:15)

Nothing gives the citizens of any nation more confidence than a strong leader so much so there've been times when people were willing to surrender their freedoms and be ruled by a strong man who'd solve all their problems.

This was parodied in Mel Brook's musical *The Producers*, a story about two Broadway Producers' attempt to stage a play so repulsive it would flop. The signature song was "*Springtime for Hitler.*"

*Germany was having problems,
Such a sad, sad, story.
Needed a new leader
to restore her former glory.
Where o where is he,
Where can that man be?
We looked around
and then we found
the man for you and me!
And now it's...Springtime
for Hitler and Germany.*

Brooks lampooned the shortsightedness of the masses clamoring for a super human god-like leader who'd not only make the trains run on time, but mystically restore confidence and prosperity.

After Jesus fed the 5,000 with only two fish and five loaves of bread an ad hoc grass roots campaign was formed to make Jesus king to restore their former glory.

Please don't go home and tell your parents I compared Hitler to Jesus. What I am doing is comparing a desperate peoples' misplaced need to experience "springtime" through a leader promising the world. Why else would Christ run for the hills after getting wind of this plot? He wanted no part of it knowing it was a flawed solution from the get go.

The Old Testament Book of Judges reports an earlier attempt to make Israel a monarchy. The judges, who ruled for roughly two to three hundred years after Moses led the people out of Egypt, were occasional, part-time leaders raised up only in times of national emergency. During this period Israel was a loose confederation of the twelve

tribes with no central government. When times were calm, everyone was content with the system, but when under attack the people had second thoughts.

Gideon was the judge pressured to become a king.

Then the Israelites said to Gideon, “Rule over us, you and your sons and your grandsons.” Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, the Lord rules over you.” (Judges 8:22-23)

Gideon resisted becoming the King of Israel because Israel already had a King. Remember, the Jews were called to be a “holy” nation, not conforming to the ways of the pagan nations and tribes surrounding them. Instead, the Israelites were supposed to have God rule over them. Only in times of crisis would a strong man be raised up to rally the nation, but these judges never behaved like kings, collecting taxes, building great public buildings and maintaining a strong standing army. Instead the Judges were “of, for and by the people,” with their term of office terminating as soon as the crisis passed, then they’d return to their plows and vineyards.

This “loosey-goosey” system worked as long as the people remembered God was their King. Unfortunately, soon after Gideon’s death his son Abimelech, after murdering all his brothers, proclaimed himself king, but after three years he was defeated and killed in battle. Because Abimelech was such an incompetent and wicked king, the people gladly went back to the old tried and true system of rule by Judges.

The last of the judges was Samuel. You may remember from Sunday School the story of the Lord calling in the night, “Samuel, Samuel” and the boy kept going back to his mentor Eli saying to him, “Her I am for you called me,” to which Eli responded, “I didn’t call you, go back to bed.” But the third time Eli told the boy to say, “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.” When Samuel again heard the voice this time he said as Eli instructed him.

We then read, “As Samuel grew up the Lord was with him...And all of Israel...knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord...for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel...And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.” (1 Samuel 3:19-41)

As it turned out, Samuel was actually a transitional figure in the history of Israel as he was the last judge to rule before Israel finally established a monarchy, roughly one thousand years before the birth of Christ. The first three kings are the best known to us: Saul, then David and finally David’s son Solomon. These three kings ruled over a united Israel. But after Solomon’s death, a civil war divided the kingdom in two and it was all downhill from there because all the kings of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) were wicked while only some of the kings of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) were good.

When you compare the track record of the Judges with the track record of the Kings, you find all the judges were pretty good rulers but most of the kings were not so good, if not downright horrible. Being a judge, and being partial to the status quo Samuel was troubled when the people came to him in his old age demanding he pick his own successor, a king to rule over them like other nations. (1 Samuel 8:5) Not liking the

idea, Samuel warned them that kings “will take your sons and turn them into his soldiers. He will take your daughters to be his perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take your best vineyards and fields, one tenth of your grain, your servants, cattle and donkeys. You will become his slaves and you’ll cry out because of your king...but the Lord will not answer you.” (1 Samuel 8:11-17)

Despite Samuel’s resistance the people were still determined to have their way, but not until Samuel sensed the Lord saying, “Listen to their voice and give them what they want,” did Samuel finally relent and start searching for the right man.

You have to wonder why God caved into their demands...or did he? Remember, biblical history is written like a modern day history only in that it reflects the opinions and beliefs of its authors. But biblical history differs from modern histories in that it’s a theologically oriented narrative, written in the context of the ancient world. When we read in 1 Samuel that God basically gave into the people’s demands for a king, sort of like a parent giving into a child’s tantrum, keep in mind there’s almost 2,500 years of world view and theological insight between us and them. Today we’d reinterpret God’s caving into the people’s demands as Samuel himself being the one who caved, certainly with great misgivings, because Samuel discerned it wasn’t God’s will for Israel to be ruled by anyone other than God himself.

So, Samuel set out to find the right man who’d humble himself before Yahweh, the true King of Israel, and rule according to God’s will.

Unfortunately, Saul, the man initially picked to be king, had a strong start but a miserable finish. You might even say Saul was doomed even before he took the job because like a new pastor whose predecessor served a congregation for thirty years, Saul had to fill Samuel’s sizeable shoes, who was still around to criticize his successor and did so whenever he could!

Unfortunately for him, Saul committed several serious offenses that incurred Samuel’s wrath. First, he didn’t wait for Samuel, who finally showed up at the last minute, to offer up a sacrifice, just before a major battle with the Philistines. Before Samuel appeared, Saul got impatient, and took on Samuel’s role as priest and made the sacrifice himself. When Samuel finally showed up he was peeved, to say the least, and predicted God would soon replace Saul with a more obedient king.

From that point on Saul was a troubled man, paranoid, probably clinically depressed and perhaps even mentally ill. His final great offense was consulting the Witch of Endor to contact Samuel, who by this time was dead, for a blessing. Not surprisingly Samuel’s spirit was angered and instead of giving his blessing he again predicted Saul would lose the throne.

Way before all this happened Samuel already started searching for Saul’s replacement and here we begin with today’s scripture that introduces David the boy who’d become Israel’s greatest, yet still flawed, King.

Sensing God's leading, Samuel went to the little town of Bethlehem to seek out Jesse, the father of many sons. Samuel interviewed each of Jesse's sons, all seven of them being big, strong, charismatic young men. But despite their outward appearance, Samuel wasn't satisfied. He then asked Jesse, "Are these all your sons?" Jesse replied, "No, the youngest one is out keeping the sheep." When the boy came Samuel knew he was the one, so he anointed him. And the author of Judges concluded, "...and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward." (Judges 16:13)

Question: What does this mostly forgotten period of bible history have to say to us today, even though it all happened just about three thousand years ago?

The short answer: plenty, especially when we remember these are stories about God's intimate involvement in the lives of his people as he slowly and painstakingly made all things work together for good and according to his purposes.

Never forget these ancient stories in the Bible are actually templates of our own stories. The defeats and triumphs of the Israelites, their joys and concerns, their hopes and despairs, their ups and downs mirror our own experiences even though we live three thousand years later and have developed a more "sophisticated" world view and theology than they. Despite these obvious differences, human nature hasn't changed and neither has God, who looks down on us with the same mixture of sorrow and happiness, frustration and maybe even amusement as we stumble through life making the same mistakes and commit the same sins.

It's true isn't it? Like the Israelites, when the chips are down and we go into crisis mode, who do we turn to first? The short answer is usually not God. Instead of seeking God's guidance and discerning God's will don't we try to fix the problem ourselves or dig in our heels, only to make the problem worse? Hopefully in time, like the Prodigal Son we finally "come to our senses" and remember God is waiting for us to come home to rest in his presence so we can discern God's guidance and discern God's will, which may be just the opposite of what we think is best. Until we figure that out, things will go haywire.

Even so, we can still count on this: God is patient and faithful, even when we're not. God wants us for himself even when we chase after other gods who promise everything but deliver nothing.

Sometime, before we go out looking for "the man for you and me," that is, anything or anyone we trust at the expense of our trust in God, please remember Great David's greater son, who like David, born in Bethlehem in lowly circumstances, is our God and King, savior and friend.

And when others chirp

Where O where is he?

Where can that man be?

we don't have to look around because we already found him and his name is Jesus.