

Series: On the Throne

Sermon: Finding your Leader - Searching for Donkeys

I Samuel 9:1a, 2-6, 14-17; 10:24-26a

There was a Benjamite, a man of standing, whose name was Kish... 2 Kish had a son named Saul, as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else.

3 Now the donkeys belonging to Saul's father Kish were lost, and Kish said to his son Saul, "Take one of the servants with you and go and look for the donkeys." 4 So he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and through the area around Shalisha, but they did not find them. They went on into the district of Shaalim, but the donkeys were not there. Then he passed through the territory of Benjamin, but they did not find them.

5 When they reached the district of Zuph, Saul said to the servant who was with him, "Come, let's go back, or my father will stop thinking about the donkeys and start worrying about us."

6 But the servant replied, "Look, in this town there is a man of God; he is highly respected, and everything he says comes true. Let's go there now. Perhaps he will tell us what way to take."

14 They went up to the town, and as they were entering it, there was Samuel, coming toward them on his way up to the high place.

15 Now the day before Saul came, the Lord had revealed this to Samuel: 16 "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him ruler over my people Israel; he will deliver them from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked on my people, for their cry has reached me."

17 When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the Lord said to him, "This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people."

10:24 Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people."

Then the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

25 Samuel explained to the people the rights and duties of kingship. He wrote them down on a scroll and deposited it before the Lord. Then Samuel dismissed the people to go to their own homes.

26a Saul also went to his home in Gibeah...

Sermon

In the small town of Argonia, Kansas, women earned the right to vote in local elections in the 1880's, a generation before the national amendment that gave that right to all women. And a group of ladies became politically active, mostly around the Temperance movement of the times. 27 year old Susanna Salter was a quiet mother and wife in this small group of women. Now, we've been in campaign mode for the last two years waaaaay too long, but back then, local elections were a different affair. Many candidates didn't put their hat in the ring until the day before - surprising the opposition party and whoever got the most people to the polls would win. Well, a group of gentlemen didn't like the idea of women in politics, let alone voting, let alone the

idea of temperance, that they concocted a plan to finally put them in their place. So the day before the election, they put 27 year old Susanny Salter on their “ticket” for Mayor, without her knowing it - thinking that they could embarrass these her with a surprise loss and put these women in their place. She was hanging her wash on the line on the morning on election day when a few of friends came up and told her that they saw her name on the ballot! And they decided to return the trick. After a day of impromptu campaigning, (it was a small town), she was elected mayor of the town. What a day. Doing laundry in the morning minding your own business, leader of a town by evening. She was the first woman in an elected office in these United States. And she did a good job - running the town with male commissioners who found out that she was competent. She even got hard cider banned in that first year. She even had a child while mayor - one of her nine kids. She only served one term, which was one more than she even ran for. She stepped down after her term, and earned the annual salary for the mayor, \$1.

Out hanging shirts and you end up mayor. Reminds me of King Saul. Three thousand years ago, the tribes of Israel were just that. Tribes. In the promised land, the twelve tribes were on their own. Every now and then, a crisis would occur that would make the tribes come together to face a foe, solve a problem. And a leader would come up to lead them for a short while. They called these leaders Judges - Gideon, Sampson, Deborah, among others. For a couple hundred years, this loose association worked. Each tribe did their own thing unless compelled to team up. But over time, Israel wanted a king. Everyone else had a king. Why can't we have a king? And the leading prophet of the time, Samuel, rebukes the tribes for wanting a king - isn't God your King. And the tribes answer back, yeah, but we want a real king, flesh and blood king. I'm paraphrasing, but you get the idea. So Samuel, with God's prodding, is looking for a candidate. There is an empty throne. This is a four week sermon series on the first three kings of Israel, how they got to be king, and we'll end with Christ the King Sunday, who is our King of Kings. But how did Saul get to be king? Samuel is looking for a candidate...

At that same time, a family in the washed up backwater tribe of Benjamin lost a few donkeys. I don't know how many donkeys, but enough to worry about them. And they send out their son with a servant to go off and find them. And they go everywhere. They go throughout all of the tribe looking for these animals. It would be like if someone up here on the hill in Oregon City lost their donkeys. And they went to Molalla, then Estacada, then Woodburn, - seriously, they went everywhere and were gone long enough that the family would stop worrying about the donkeys and start worrying about the search party. Saul and servant decide that they need a little help, maybe even supernatural help, so they seek out the seer, the prophet Samuel. You'll notice that I cut out a lot of dialogue in the scripture that was read today, feel free and read the 9th and 10th chapter if you want the full picture. But Samuel, after hearing a message that he will find the new King, sees this young handsome tall man and says to himself, Surely this is the guy! And he tells Saul, guess what! This morning you were looking for donkeys. Tomorrow I will anoint you king. Surprise Surprise Surprise! He also told him that the donkeys had returned to their homes, they were fine, in case you were curious.

Here's the deal. Samuel chose Saul because he LOOKED the part of the King. He fit all of the qualifications for what they thought a king should be. Tall. Handsome. You could imagine that he had his little entourage and followers back home. But in truth, the guy had little or no qualifications to be King. Yes, God often works with that. Like David the next king, but at least David already killed Goliath by that point. Saul was out looking for donkeys. I thought about calling this sermon, this sermon about finding the next leader of the nation: “Out looking for Asses.” But that might come off too strong.

Saul turned out to be an ineffective king. As I read from one Bible interpreter, “Saul was not a great king, nor was he even a good man. He was deeply flawed, and the entire first half of Samuel is dedicated to a character study about his failures. When reading through Samuel, you might have a tendency to become critical or judgemental of Saul at times; you'll probably feel sorry for him at times too. But slow down, and be honest with yourself. If you're open-minded, you'll realize you likely have more in common with Saul than you'd care to admit. The whole point of exploring Saul's failures is to warn us, so we don't repeat his mistakes.”

In these times of political turmoil, I hope we chose our leaders, not because they look like leaders. Not because they have the right stature, sex, physical attributes or even intellect. But are they kind? Are they compassionate? Do they care about serving? Do they care about you? What did Saul do after he was crowned king? He went home. Not just for a night. Or day. Thanks for making me king! Call me when you need something. If it sounds like I'm getting too political here, is it wrong to want a leader who cares about leading? For the record, I wrote that last paragraph for another sermon 20 years ago. It just seems more appropriate now.

The best thing I like about Saul is what he said right after he was crowned King. Out of I Samuel 11, there were citizens who were opposed to the Kingship of Saul. They didn't vote for him. Well, you don't vote for king, now do you. But Saul said this: The people came to Samuel then and said, "Where are those men who said, 'Saul is not fit to rule over us'? Hand them over. We'll kill them!" But Saul said, "Nobody is going to be executed this day." No retribution for the opposition party - a novelty in that day. Lets united the nation - not kill those who don't like me.

This All Saints Day, we remember the people in our life who showed us kindness. Compassion. Teaching. Love. They might have come in all shapes and sizes. From different walks of life. But they showed us what a life of faith looked like. What a life of love looked like. What a life of service looked like. May we be like the saints before us, that we might be a saint to someone else. Maybe you think that you're just doing laundry, or out looking for animals, but you never know what the day will bring, or how you touch those around you.

May God bless us, and the saints and leaders that go before us. And the family of God said, AMEN.

Opening:

Friends and family of OCUMC, welcome to All Saints Day - a day that we remember the people in our past who made us what we are today - especially in this life of faith. We may think of famous saints, Valentine, Patrick, Nicolas, Mary Peter James John. But who were the saints in your life? How do you remember them? Later on in this service we'll light candles in honor of those whom you have named this past week. But first, let's take a trip out to Mountain View Cemetery for a quick story.

Mountain View Cemetery, established in 1854, is one of the oldest cemeteries in the West. The first known burial occurred in December 1847 for infant John Barclay, son of Dr. and Mrs. Barclay - and that was before this was a cemetery. In 1863 the Clackamas County Sheriff and family deeded five acres of land for \$5.00 to the city council of Oregon City for the use as a public cemetery - since there were burials happening here anyway. They also deeded one acre of adjacent land to the Masonic Lodge, also for a cemetery. These two cemeteries are the two oldest sections of Mountain View Cemetery, which now include fifty-four acres of property.

This grave has a unique story of remembrance.

In the earliest days of Oregon City, the Hunsakers arrived over the trail in 1846. They prospered and helped others who came in the years behind them. But in January of 1853, the Hunsaker family needed help of their own when their eldest daughter, Josephine, became very sick (diphtheria or typhoid, the stories conflict.) There wasn't much that could be done in those days. When Dr. John McLoughlin, a family friend heard about Josephine, he brought her something special. He cut a rose out of his garden (a rare flower in those days in Oregon) - dug it up, put it in a pot and brought it down and planted it outside the window of her house so that she could see the little rose," Josephine died in March at the age of 12. Her brother, Horton, also became sick and died a few months later. The family buried their two children next to each other and their mother then took the rose from outside her daughter's window and planted it here, at the grave site. Since then, the rose that McLoughlin gave to Josephine has been there - blooming during the spring and summer months and dying off in the fall and winter. And at one point, it was almost wiped out. You see for years, the rose bush was mowed over before anyone realized the significance of the plant. Then a historian came along and all of a sudden discovered that 'hey that is the bush - that is the sacred bush,' " And to this day, 167 years later, that rose bush continues to tell the story of loss, but also of love and faith. I find that kind of sweet. Here are this morning announcements.

Children's Time:

I remember recess and gym class a long time ago, and we would play team games. And in most of these games, we had to pick our own teams. And so two people would pick the people to be on their teams. And if we were playing basketball, the tall people got picked first, and the short people were picked last. If we were playing kickball, the fastest people got picked first, and the slow people were picked last. We've all that experience of being picked last at something.

But instead of picking team mates for baseball, what if you were picking something more important? Let's say you wanted to pick someone to be your doctor, what would you look for? Probably not height or speed, but maybe education. Experience. A caring attitude. If you wanted to pick out your teacher, what would you look for? Maybe knowledge, gentleness. A passion for teaching and learning. If you were picking out a boyfriend or girlfriend, what would you look for? Someone who was cute to you. Someone who liked you back. Personality and looks. Or in my case, I had to look for someone with weak eyes.

But what if. What if you had to pick your or queen? I know we don't have kings and queens, but if we did, what would you look for? I found this list in a survey of what you want in a leader: They are centered, decisive, lives with integrity, protects their citizens, provides order, creates and inspires the best in others." Not a bad list. I could live with a leader that that.

Three thousand years ago, the people of Israel wanted a king as well. And they looked around, and thought about what kind of king they wanted. They chose a man named Saul. There's more to it than that on how he got picked - but do you know why he was picked? Was he smart? They didn't know. Was he kind? They didn't know. Did he have integrity? They didn't know. They went back to school yard rules - they chose him because he was tall. Several times they remind the Bible reader that Saul was head and shoulders taller than those around him. He looked like a king! But we need to remember what the Bible also says, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected <Saul>. For the Lord sees not as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." - 1 Sam 16:7.

If you're picking a someone to be on your small group team in math, pick someone smart. But if you're picking a leader, pick someone with a good heart. Thanks for stopping by!

Prayer:

We give you thanks, O God, for all the saints who ever worshiped you,
whether in arbors or cathedrals,
wooden churches or cement meeting houses.

We give you thanks, O God, for hands lifted in praise:
manicured hands and hands stained with grease or soil,
strong hands and hands gnarled with age,
holy hands.

We thank you, God, for hardworking saints,
whether hard-hatted or aproned,
blue-collared or three-piece-suited.
They left their mark for you, for us, for our children to come.

Thank you for the sacrifices made by those who have gone before us.
Bless the memories of your saints.
May we learn how to walk wisely from their examples of faith, dedication, worship, and love.

It is in Christ's name we pray and live - through the prayer shared by saints throughout the ages: Our Father...

Offertory:

Eight years ago, the election of 2012 was coming up, and I remember reading something in John Wesley's journal about elections. So I made a quick meme and posted in on our church's Facebook page and people shared it. Since then, it has taken a life of its own and if you google John Wesley Election, it is the first image that pops up. I've seen friends post it recently (I have a lot of pastor friends) and everytime I see it, I think "Hee-hee-hee, I made this" Here's the quote from October 6, 1774:

I met those of our society who had votes in the ensuing election, and advised them

1. To vote, without fee or reward, for the person they judged most worthy
2. To speak no evil of the person they voted against, and
3. To take care their spirits were not sharpened against those that voted on the other side."

At this time, we offer up our tithes and offering that they may do good in the world. Feed the hungry, both in belly and soul. As we offer up our ballots this week, may we do so in the hope that they also do good in the world. And to speak no evil of the person against, and to still love those on the other side. Not for their sake, but for yours, that you might have a clean heart and light burdens. Let us receive the offering.

Closing:

Go on your way rejoicing;
Surrounded as you are by such a great cloud of witnesses,
take courage as you face each new challenge,
and comfort when you pick yourself from a fall,
In whatever good you choose to do,
precede it with hope,
accompany it with prayer,
and follow it with thanksgiving.

The blessing of God Most Wonderful,
whom the saints have trusted as
Father - who sits on the throne, Son and Holy Spirit,
will be with you
now and ever more.

All Saints Day:

November 1 is All Saints Day, a sometimes-overlooked holy day in the life of Congregations. It just happens to hit a Sunday this year. It is not nearly as well known as the day before, All Hallows' Eve, better known as Halloween. But All Hallows Day, or All Saints Day, is important to us.

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, enjoyed and celebrated All Saints Day. In a journal entry from November 1, 1767, Wesley calls it "a festival I truly love." On the same day in 1788, he writes, "I always find this a comfortable day." The following year he calls it "a day that I peculiarly love."

This may sound odd. United Methodists don't believe in saints. Right? Well, yes... and no. We don't invoke the saints, as other faiths may do, but we do remember them and call upon them as a model and goal to aspire to. From the early days of Christianity, there is a sense that the Church consists of not only all living believers, but also all who have gone before us. For example, in Hebrews 12 the author encourages Christians to remember that a "great cloud of witnesses" surrounds us encouraging us, cheering us on.

Alongside the likes of Paul from the New Testament, Augustine, Martin Luther, and John and Charles Wesley, we tell stories of the grandmother who took us to church every Sunday. We remember the pastor who prayed with us in the hospital, and the neighbor who changed the oil in the family car. We give thanks for the youth leader who told us Jesus loved us, the kindergarten Sunday school teacher who showered us with that love, and the woman in the church who bought us groceries when we were out of work.

Retelling these stories grounds us in our history. These memories teach us how God has provided for us through the generosity and sacrifice of those who have come before us. The stories of the saints encourage us to be all God has created us to be.

In our church we light candles in the memory of the saints in our lives - especially those who, from our church's number, have left us in the past year. Praise be to God, we have no candles to light for any within our church membership who have died this past year - a first in many a year. Thank's be to God. But a few of our faithful have requested we light a candle for loved ones.

We bless your holy name, O God, for all your servants who, having finished their course, now rest from their labors. Give us grace to follow the example of their steadfastness and faithfulness, to your honor and glory; through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

We remember: Fred Sodorff, Virginia Ferguson, Jack Palmer, Bob Brenno, Vic Spainhower, Jay Lawson, Meggan Parkinson, Jerry Bevens, Holly Griffith, Colton Hargreaves

For these lives and many more, we give thee thanks. Amen.