



March 23: Who's Your Hope? | 1 Samuel 8

Back in September of 2001, my close friend Jen and I, took off on our dream, once in a lifetime, international ROAD TRIP to Ireland. 10 days of driving all over the Emerald Isle.

Our goal was to see as many of the sights this exact version of our travel guide recommended.

The Conamara Country, where I saw the most majestic sunset in my whole life!

Inishmore, a small island off the west coast of Ireland. So small, we mooed to one cow and within a minute all the cows across the whole island were mooing.

Newgrange, I stood inside this stone structure that is older than the pyramids.

Book of Kells, illuminated text of the first four gospels created around 800 AD, on display at Trinity College. While my friend was on a tour at the Guinness beer factory, I got my nerd on at Trinity College. Oh the beauty of this book. We had a blast!

One day though, we had gotten completely lost, driving around desperately looking for a human being. We even prayed, finally putting our hope in God.

Until, we came around a corner, and came upon a field where guys were playing rugby. Feeling hopeful, we pulled in and approached the first guy we came to.

I remember his impressive thick blue and green rugby jersey. We explained we were terribly lost and could he help? He smiled, nodded his head, and began speaking in Gaelic!

Not a single word of English. We tried using the map. "Could you just point a way out for us? Yes...?" No.

Feeling more lost than ever, we got back in our rental. After a giggle and a deep sigh, we grabbed the map and owned our need to just fix the problem. Maybe we should have done that in the first place. But we worked together and figured it out.

In 1st Samuel chapter 8, the Israelites are also feeling a bit lost.

Samuel had appointed his sons to be judges over Israel. But his sons turned out to be completely corrupt. So, the Israelites look around at the other nations, and decide they just need a king.

Samuel, who was appointed by God to be their leader as prophet, is displeased and prays to God. God tells Samuel the people are not rejecting Samuel but God.

God says in verse 7, **“Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.”** And God tells Samuel to warn them about the consequences of having a king. Tell them the king will be within his rights to exploit them.

So, in verses 11 through 17, Samuel explains all the ways a king will use them. He will take their sons and make them soldiers, farmers, and makers of weapons. The king will take their daughters and make them perfumers, cooks, and bakers.

He will take the best of their olive fields, and take a tenth of their grain and flocks, take your slaves and make them his. And then the king will take your freedom and make you his slaves. “He will take and take and take”. “He will take” is mentioned at least 6 times in 7 verses.

But despite the extended and descriptive warning, the people insist on having a king. And with a deep sigh of his own, God instructs Samuel to give them what they want.

And we hear a story that is often repeated throughout history. When we are dissatisfied, frustrated or scared the idea of, “Let’s just get ourselves a strong new leader!”, that idea can seem like our only hope to get where we want to go.

But the story of the Israelite people and their demand for a king is a powerful reminder of just how quickly we forget our God.

And we forget that human leaders are...well, all too human. And that we must remind ourselves to place our ultimate hope in our Lord, the true King.

Israel made the mistake of instead of looking up in faith and dependence on their God...they looked around at the other godless nations. They reject their God-given leadership and reject God as their leader.

We read this in verse 19 says, **“But the people refused to listen to Samuel. “No!” They said. “We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.”**

They wanted someone to pick up responsibility to fix things, to lead, go out before them, and fight their battles for them. We want someone else to do these things.

When I first read this text, all I could think about was our politics.

It would be easy to make this text only about our democratic system, recent transfer of power, and whether we are pleased or disappointed politically.

Was this kind of a question in the back of your minds this morning? This text and being within three months of our new President taking office?

But honestly, focusing only on politics, I think that would be unhelpful. I’m not going to do that. Not helpful. That’s not what I want and I know that’s not what you want.

Mostly, because that is NOT who we are at BUMC.

Before I came here to be your pastor, I was assured we were a church that was able to leave our political debates at the door. That we do not have red seating or blue seating in this sanctuary. Instead, I was assured we were a church that truly celebrates and finds its unity in God.

That when we come into this space we affirm, worship, and follow the Lord as our King of Kings who unifies us. And that all of this is “kingdom seating”.

Anywhere you sit, you are NOT sitting in the Democrat section or the Republican section. Anywhere you sit, in here, is kingdom seating, a seat for someone who loves God.

I had to chuckle in reading this. We have been doing what God instructed Samuel to do, **“Listen to all the people are saying to you...”** as we went through the SWOT process AND now through the surveys the Outreach and Youth Task Forces have handed out. Listening builds unity.

Because of our faith in God...over the years, this church has pulled together, picked up responsibility, and figured out ways forward.

In faith, currently, again we are finding ways to be unified and move forward AND Godward that works for us...in a variety of ways.

But you don't have to just take my word for it. I asked a few people to share their perspective, in their own words, how God is our hope. How God is helping us pull together, pick up responsibility and figure out a way forward, a way Godward.

First, I called Gaily Hurley, the chair of the Leadership Team to see if this idea of hoping in God, pulling together, picking up responsibility, figuring out a way Godward made sense from her perspective?

She said yes, it all makes sense. We are doing that. Knowing she'd be out of town at a UEC retreat, she wrote a few lines in her own words, for me to share on her behalf. She wrote...

I see God moving us to bind together and MOVE in the direction He needs us to go. It started with SWOT in reaching out and asking others what they see as our church needs, wants, desires.

From there we developed invited people to join 2 task forces, and people stepped up and they got started. It is very exciting to see the energy, passion and excitement coming from these two teams!

And I also see how the Leadership team has been pulling together by listening to each other and talking about important issues while making plans moving forward.

As far as myself I have a "friend" (who is reading this...thanks, Gail) who seems to have a way of "directing" new paths for me to lead in ways that are definitely stretching me as a leader. But it's all good, I can handle it.

Then, I called the Youth Task Force and asked if they would share their perspective of how we are putting our hope in God. Could George Christ, from the Youth Task Force please come to share?

And, now Bob Highberg from the Outreach Task Force?

I am so grateful for Gail, George, and Bob in their sharing in their own words how this church knows how to hope in God. How this church knows how to pull together in faith, this church knows how to pick up responsibility, face things and figure out solutions that keep us moving Godward.

I didn't know this about our church back when we were compiling our SWOT. Otherwise, I think I would have said I think this is one of our strengths. We know how to hope in God and rebuild.

And in closing, I just want to thank you, thank this church for your love of this church and for putting your hope in God in so many ways. That your love of God helps you pull together in faith, to pick up responsibility and find solutions that fit us as a church.

And in lieu of our normal **Time of Reflection**, I'd like to close in prayer for us...

God of the Journey

We come before You with gratitude to overflowing, gratitude for this church, for our history, and the love that binds us together. We seek Your wisdom and direction in our lives.

Thank You for the unwavering faith and dedication of this congregation. Their love for You and for one another is a testament to Your grace and mercy.

We are grateful for the guidance and encouragement You provide, enabling us to take on responsibilities and find solutions that keep us moving forward and Godward.

Lord, continue to bless this church with unity and purpose. Help us to support one another, lifting each other up in times of need and celebrating together in times of joy. Help us to keep praying for one another, praying our Lenten Breakthrough Prayer, and praying for the two task forces.

In closing, guide and sustain us as we continue our Lenten journey, as we move with Christ toward the Cross.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.