

## 1 Samuel 8: 4-9

<sup>4</sup> Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, <sup>5</sup> and said to him, “You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.” <sup>6</sup> But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to govern us.” Samuel prayed to the LORD, <sup>7</sup> and the LORD said to Samuel, “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 king over them. <sup>8</sup> Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. <sup>9</sup> Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.”

## Ephesians 1: 15-23

<sup>15</sup> I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason <sup>16</sup> I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, <sup>18</sup> so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. <sup>20</sup> God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. <sup>22</sup> And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

### **Trinity Presbyterian Church**

**November 27, 2017**

**Reign of Christ Sunday**

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### **“A Political Prayer for a Political Time”**

Recently, our president returned home from a tour in Asia. Air Force One hopping across the Eastern territories as the president schmoozed with other world leaders, while enjoying eloquent ceremonies held in his honor. Political analysts began interpreting the soirées: some said the leaders were trying to get on the president’s good side; others said they were “massaging his ego.” But then a discussion ensued about whether or not the president of the United States was still the most powerful person on the planet. Why does the conversation always come back to who has the most power? Maybe it’s why the letter to the Ephesians begins with a prayer: “May you know the greatness of *God’s power*. A power which reigns above all other powers.” It’s a nice word, but what exactly does God’s power look like in our world?

As we start, we notice that inside the prayer is a political statement for a political time: *God's power reigns above all other authorities*. We are not subjects of our earthly rulers. Nor are we bound to pledge our allegiance to a party or governing leader. There is an authority who sits higher than the oval office; who is greater than those who hold the keycodes to nuclear weapons. There is a power in the world which can not be held down even by death. Every politician who squats on their leather power seat in Capital Hill will one day have to answer to a Higher Power for their actions. Every Hollywood director or actor, who has abused their power to assault a woman or man will one day stand before the Lord. Even pastors who have used the power of their office to enable hatred, white nationalism, and bigotry will one day have to answer to the Christ they claim to serve. Which provides a great comfort to me. At least until I realize that I too will one day be held accountable to the Christ I claim to serve! It does not matter how much privilege or prestige we've accumulated, or how many lawyers with their attaché cases we have standing by our side. All of us will answer to the power which reigns higher than all other powers. "May you know the greatness of such power," says the writer. It's a political prayer for a political time.

But let's be honest. We do not experience God's authority as reigning over our human systems. There is far too much injustice and pain in the world to claim that God is ultimately in control. We know God champions the poor, yet lawmakers are trying to offer the big tax breaks to the rich—it will "trickle down," they say. Where's God's authority? We know God cares for the sick, but our healthcare system is angling to benefit the healthy and the wealthy. Where is God's authority? With the sunrise of each new day, comes an array of issues and we wonder where is God's authority? Even in churches we often do not experience Christ as the head authority. During a session meeting one month we took an empty chair, placed it in the center of the room and said as we are making decisions we are going to do so as if Jesus is sitting right there in the empty chair. It was a reminder to all of us because we so often forget. As much as we say God's authority reigns, when we get inside the politics of the church or we hold up the morning newspaper it doesn't line up. Too often, we do not experience God's authority as reigning above our human power systems.

Perhaps, when we turn to our bibles, it's why Israel decided they need a king. A flesh and bone representative to reign over the kingdom. Remember the conversation?

"We want a king," said Israel.

"But you don't need a king," the prophet Samuel says, "We have God."

"We need a king," said the people.

"But a king will abuse their power."

"Everybody else has a king. We need one too." Now Israel is sounding like a teenager.

"But a king will take your best crops, your best workers."

"We need a king."

“But a king will tax you madly. They will take at least 10% of everything you have.”

“We want a king.”

“Fine” Samuel consents and finds Saul.

Sure enough, even though Saul never wants the job, when he gets the royal signet on his finger and an army at his command he becomes addicted to the power. So when the time comes to relinquish the throne to the next generation, Saul ends up wanting to eliminate the competition. Then power seduces King David, the pure in heart, when he assaults Bathsheba. We see her joining the **#metoo** movement with thousands of other women. Then King Solomon collects women and wealth; he builds a temple against God’s recommendation. Again and again God’s power is not enough for us, so we create structures with leaders to stand in for God who end up getting trapped in their power. We see it in the bible and in the world today. All because we don’t experience God’s almightiness in the ways that we are hoping for.

So maybe we need to reexamine our understanding of what God’s power looks like. Maybe we need to ditch our old god expectations—like shedding old snakeskin so we can emerge with a new understanding. You know, most of us were raised to believe in a god who can swoop in at any moment if “he” chooses. Whose power could protect the faithful, cure the cancer, put a stop to the depression. But most of the time it doesn’t work that way. So we find ourselves having a crisis of faith. A couple weeks ago, when a vibrant six-year old boy in our daughter’s class suddenly died, we all wondered how God could let such a thing could happen. It impacted all of us. The family’s church stood with them in the massive hole this child’s death created. They held a kid-friendly service with Legos and crafts for his friends, because they didn’t want the children to be afraid of death. They got to be the church. But God did not save the child. So what does God’s power look like?

You know, when Jesus went on his ministry tour the people wanted to see God’s power in action. So they said to Jesus, “Show us God’s power.” And so Jesus went into the community care clinic and he touched every person he could, even the man whose skin was falling off his face.

“Well, that’s real nice,” the people said, “But show us God’s power.” So Jesus gathered a bunch of little children, who the disciples tried to shoo away and said, “Let them come, the kingdom is for them.”

“Well, that’s inclusive of you Jesus, but show us God’s power.” So Jesus got out a water basin and a servants rag, got on the dirty floor and began washing the disciple’s feet.

“No, no, no show us God’s almighty power!” And that’s when Jesus picked up the cross and carried it as far as he could.

Then as the soldiers watched him hang they said, “Come on King of the Jews, show us God’s power.” And that’s when Jesus said, “O God, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”

May you know the greatness of God's power. A power which reigns high above all others.  
Amazing, how often we miss it, even when it is right there in front of our eyes...