

## June 6, 2021 (Focus: Isaiah 6: 1-81 Samuel 8)

There was this girl in high school, I'll call her Betsy. Betsy was a sometime part of my group of friends. She was the sort of person who seemed to know a lot of people, but wasn't really close to anyone, in part because she wasn't the most reliable of friends. It wasn't that she was rude or insensitive necessarily; no one ever seemed very mad at her when she'd go off and spend more time with another group and then come back to our group as if nothing had happened. We could sense that Betsy really didn't know where she belonged, not that any of us were any less sure, but Betsy even more so seemed to be unsure of herself, what she wanted, what she stood for, who she was.

Israelites wandering in the desert; new to this idea that they were the ones whom God had saved, new to this idea that they were God's people following God's ways. Like any people new to an identity and to a way of living, they did not take to it completely on the first try. Wandering in the desert, they complained several times about whether God was really with them, and whether following this God was really such a great idea. Where is the water? God provided. But then where was the food? God provided. This went on and on; God's people were still getting used to their identity as God's people, and they needed to practice it (and sometimes falter at it) before they got better at this faith thing.

Then their leader, Moses, the one who seemed most in touch with God, went up the mountain and seemed to abandon them. They got anxious, and started to doubt again this new God of theirs, and so resorted to something more comfortable, something they were used to before, something that wouldn't set them so much apart from others: they made a golden idol to worship, for worshipping this one true God seemed to be just too tough an identity to embrace.

And today we hear of another instance: the prophet Samuel encounters a people who are having trouble trusting in God and following God's ways. Even Samuel's sons can't seem to get it right. Who is to lead them now? How about a king? Other people have kings, and kings we understand, there are prescribed rules we all know and are fairly straightforward to

follow when one has a king. Yes, let's have a king. This God thing is a little too ethereal and mysterious; we want something more tangible. Besides, with a king we won't have these expectations on us to do good and be good. We can just go about our everyday lives and not worry so much about all that love one another and help the poor and the alien and the stranger and...

The Israelites were still working on their identity, and what it meant to be God's people, and it was just too difficult sometimes. Give us a king, yes, even if he oppresses us and our children, even if we have to now work for him and not for ourselves. It is familiar, it is known.

Church today faced with some unfamiliar: declining membership, people not automatically join a church, more non-religious than religious, and we are faced with maybe looking at ourselves in different ways. Some in the church are facing the fact that they do not really set an open table where all are welcome just as they are. Some in the church are facing the fact that their neighbors have changed and they are not sure how to relate to their new neighbors. We are facing the fact that people don't automatically join a church, so just being welcoming when someone crosses our doorway is not enough in terms of reaching out to share the good news. Some in the church are waking up to the sense that just showing up on a Sunday morning isn't the full scope of what it means to be a Jesus follower; that our faith is about more than just Sunday morning.

And now with this pandemic experience, we are facing some questions and some visioning work on what it means to be the church living into the future. What do we continue to do, what of the past do we take into the future, and what new ways of being people of faith are we envisioning for the future.

Need to stay in one place, grow into who you are created to be, not be distracted by the shiny new thing.

Let us turn our hearts and minds again to God in prayer.

God of all, wrap us in your love and care today. May we each in our private concerns hear your universal call to come, lay down heavy burdens, and find a welcome rest, find renewal, find new patience and strength and courage.

God of the one and God of the whole, be with those who are venturing out from isolation and those who are not yet comfortable doing so. Be with those who hope to go back to work soon, and those who fear reopening too soon will place undo burdens on their work. Be with our children and youth, parents and teachers and administrators as they finish up this strange school year and again try to live into a summer that will involve further adjustments, tough choices, and sacrifices.

God who promises eternal life to all, we remember in our prayers today those who lost their lives serving our country that they may be resting in your peace and love. Bless families that mourn a loss. And help us to learn war no more, to truly beat our swords into plowshares. Help us to embrace the ways of understanding and peace.

There are so many among us, in our community, and in the world in need of your healing compassion and care – grant all in need an experience of your renewing touch, especially...

Silent prayer/meditation

God of each one and God of all, help us as we carry our personal loads. Inspire us to help lighten each other's loads, so that we may journey forth united in vision and courage with the one we call Christ, our teacher and mentor and brother, who taught us to pray to you saying, Our Father,...

Amen.