

## “Answering the Call”

1 Samuel 8:4-18

Lorenzo Small’s Installation

First Presbyterian Church

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1Sam. 8:4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, 5 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.***” 6 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to govern us.” Samuel prayed to the LORD, 7 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.*** 8 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. 9 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.***”

1Sam. 8:10 ***So Samuel reported all the words of the LORD to the people*** who were asking him for a king. 11 He said, ***“These will be the ways of the king*** who will reign over you: ***he will take*** your sons and ***appoint*** them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; 12 and he will ***appoint*** for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. 13 ***He will take*** your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 ***He will take*** the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and ***give*** them to his courtiers. 15 ***He will take*** one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and ***give*** it to his officers and his courtiers. 16 ***He will take*** your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and ***put*** them to his work. 17 ***He will take*** one-tenth of your flocks, and ***you shall be his slaves.*** 18 And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not answer you in that day.”

Good afternoon First Presbyterian and friends! It's great to be here with you today for Rev. Lorenzo Small's installation as your pastor. I want to start off today saying that it has been wonderful to watch Lorenzo grow first as a student, then as a young preacher, and now into a seasoned pastor, one able to lead a church like First Church in Battle Creek. It's always a proud moment as a professor when we get to see who our students have become. It is a special gift to get to see them as they move on to accept a charge and to be installed. This is now the third congregational context in which I have seen you serve and each of them represent your growth as a pastor. I am grateful to be here with you all on this occasion!

As I said before, I am grateful for this congregation to calling Lorenzo, for taking a chance to bear witness to God's reconciliation, for taking a chance to speak against the divisions of this world, for taking a chance and be different, calling a Southern, African American, Conservative leaning, Christ convicted, Jesus freak of a Presbyterian Preacher to be your pastor! Thank you for listening to God, for hearing God's call on you to be an exemplar for the whole church! May your church grow by leaps and bounds, may your church change the way the world thinks about race and division, may your church be an example of the Reign of God coming in the midst of a dying world! May your church practice Resurrection that others might find new life as well!

This installation service is the culmination of an event that began years ago. You see, going into the ministry is not just a career choice, it is not just a decision that one makes out of the blue. You don't just go through a list of career options and go "massage therapist, merchant, milliner, minister, model. I guess I'll be a minister!" Going into ministry involves *responding to a call from God.*

That's precisely where we find Samuel today in our focal passage. Samuel is a figure who has been involved in leadership for sometime; but in this moment, his role is about to change markedly. While he has led the people heretofore, and served as their judge, their chief political head, the people are now demanding to have a king. The king would come in and be the new political head. The king will be the one to unite the people as a nation. The king would be the one to lead the people into battle. The king would be the one to serve as the religious head of state as well. The king would remove the responsibility of being the "hands of God" from Samuel.

But that does not mean that Samuel is without a charge. It is in this particular moment in this particular passage that Samuel goes from being the de facto, religious judge *to being a prophet*. He goes from being "God's hands" to being "God's mouth!"

I would argue that in part *this story is the call of Samuel to be a prophet*. We know that Samuel was early on as a child working as a servant to Eli, called to God's service, as he was approached on his bed in the night. But in *this* story, we see the transformation of Samuel, from being the rallying judge of the people of Israel to being its first legitimate prophet. In essence, what a prophet is, is one who speaks "thus says YHWH God" to the king.

I like to call this passage the "*prophetic rebuttal*," because in essence, what goes on in this passage is that Samuel declares to the people what it will be like for them to have a king. Over the period of the Israelite monarchy, prophets and kings are in constant engagement. There is often discord, disagreement, conflict between these

two offices as the prophet will hold the king accountable to do what it is that God said to do particularly when the king loses focus. Yes, prophets are those called on *to bring the king to account, to hold the king accountable* when kingship becomes more about him, his desires, his will than about doing God's will. The prophet's job is to make sure that those who are kings, always remember what "thus says the Lord."

### **You Have a King!**

There's a whole lot that I can say about this passage in relationship to Lorenzo's installation today. But, the first thing I feel led to point out is that *YHWH is the King!* You see at the start of this story Samuel runs to God with his tail between his legs complaining that the people have rejected his leadership. He is upset because he thought that he served the role that a king would fill. He took the call for a king personally, *felt some kind of way about it*, felt hurt, rejected, dejected by their demand for a king.

I suppose I could say that the first lesson might be don't take ministry personally...don't get caught up in the way that people react to you, what they say has less to do with you than about them, don't let them get you down. That's a good message, *but that's not the first lesson for today.*

I suppose I could talk about the first lesson being that Samuel made the mistake of thinking it was all about him...that Samuel got things twisted...that Samuel forgot that it was *not him who was rejected, but God.* That, too, is a good message...*but is not the first lesson for today.*

I think the first lesson for today has to do with true Kingship. Samuel is reminded by YHWH of **Who** really is Israel's King. After all it was YHWH Who rescued the people from Egyptian slavery; YHWH Who led the people through 40 years of wilderness wanderings; YHWH Who delivered the people from hunger and homelessness and hopelessness time and time again; YHWH Who brought the people through "many dangers, toils, and snares"; YHWH who gave the people a land "flowing with milk and honey" where everyone could own a piece of land to live on...it was **YHWH Who was their King!**

So the first lesson I want you to get from this passage is that you have been called to proclaim one King; YHWH is King, Jesus is King, **our God is our King!** No matter what season, what reason, what time you are called on to utter a word...the fundamental core of your message should in somehow or another, always and forever be that **our God is King!** Everything you say each and every day should return to the fact that **our God's will should be done!** The chief end of your call should be to establish the Lordship of Jesus Christ and to call the people you shepherd to manifest God's will (not their will, not the world's will, not the government's will, not their job's will, not their wife's will, not their husband's will, **but God's will**) each and every day. This is your mantra to repeat, this is your message to share, this is the heart of your calling...declaring the Kingship of God! Yes, I think that this is the first lesson God wants you to get from this passage!

For you see, the crisis that the people find themselves in as they demand a king came about precisely because **they forgot that they already had One!** How many of the problems that we face in this world come about because **we have forgotten that we have a King?** How often do we all forget in the midst of our trouble that we have a King? How often have we in times of distress forgotten that we have

someOne Who will deliver us? How often in the midst of the inevitable hardships or uncertainty, or anxiety, or loss do we forget that we have someOne on Whom we can fully depend? Part of the first lesson for you today is to boldly proclaim that *we have a King...and his name is Jesus!*

### **Say It All!**

The second thing I feel led to point out is the way that Samuel responds to God's charge. The first thing he does is he precisely presents what it is that God said to him. The text says, "*Samuel reported all the words of YHWH to the people...*". You see the role of one who delivers thus says the Lord is to bring forward what it is that God said as faithfully as possible. The charge is not to "kinda" say what God said...not to soften God's message...not to make it more palatable to the people...not to make it more popular for the people...*Samuel said it all!*

Now, I have to admit that this is hard work because such candor, such faithful reporting of the often hard words of YHWH *can make you unpopular with the people!* Samuel, in this story is definitively at odds with all of the people who wanted to king. He is literally telling them *everything you want is wrong and it will cost you and when it does it will all be your own fault! That's not what the people wanted to hear!*

Lorenzo, there are going to be times when you will have to tell the people that you serve unpopular things, challenging things, things that make them unhappy with you.

- You will have to tell rich people that God said to give their money away.
- You will have to tell comfortable people something that God said that makes them feel completely uncomfortable.

-You will have to challenge familiar traditions with God's vision of the *new* that God will do.

-You will have to remind the people God said to Love some people that they don't even like and to work for change that isn't to their advantage!

The call you are answering will require you to *deliver unpopular words that will even put you at risk.*

*I remember the story recorded in the book turned movie "Blood Done Sign My Name." Therein Tim Tyson tells the story of this father Vernon, a white Methodist Preacher and pastor of Oxford United Methodist Church in Oxford, NC who had to confront his community and his congregation about the need for them to do justice in the aftermath of the lynching of a black man named Henry Marrow. Vernon joined the Civil Rights Movement and for that was threatened by his own people, was even forced out of his pulpit for faithfully proclaiming what "thus said the Lord!"*

*You see, saying it all can cost you!*

But that being said, the role of the one called by God is not self protection, or looking out for his or her own best interest. The role of the "called one" really is to say precisely what God said to say to the people. *The role of the one called is to "say it all!"*

## **Confront Kingship**

Another thing that we can see in this passage is the way the prophet defines the nature of what kingship will look like. He says that kingship will be a series of

unfettered, “takings” and “self givings.” The king will take from the people all the things that are valuable to them even their children, even their freedom. The king will also give... But only give to himself and to his courtiers, his insiders, his boys. The king is the representation of selfish power out of balance that imperils the people.

In part, that’s one of the things that we have to consider as you enter into your role as pastor. You see the king is not just a single person these days. As you pastor the congregation, you will have to realize that there’s perhaps a little bit of king in your congregants, too!

- Some of them will wield political power and want to do so for their own personal advantage.

- Some of them will wield economic power and want to do so for their own profit.

- Others will wield social power and will try to make decisions that are self aggrandizing and elevating their own selves.

But your role as one called by God is to remind them that they are, that we are always to do God’s will. No matter what goes on you are to call them to do God’s will, and not their own. So in part this third message is that ***God’s will supersedes our own.***

### **A Word Unheeded**

I want to point out another part of this narrative that is supremely important as you think about life and pastoral ministry. That is that, despite the power of the message that Samuel will deliver; despite the fact that he’s right on track and if the people will follow him they can avoid a lot of trouble; despite the fact that this



statement here in first Samuel chapter 8 is a warning that *if heeded will save the nation of Israel*; despite all the good that could come from listening to Samuel, *the people did not heed his message.*

Perhaps the thing that I want you to get as well is that your ministry is not a ministry premised on success. No matter how eloquently you couch your message. No matter how wonderful the stories you tell to convince the people to follow what God says, no matter what you say or how you say it your congregation, *they still may choose to ignore your message.*

*But don't feel bad...just look at the history of prophetic witnesses.*

*-Amos and Hosea weren't successful in convincing Israel to repent...Israel fell!*

*-Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah weren't successful in getting Judah to walk justly...Jerusalem fell!*

*-Even though Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, he did not get the people in his day to repent and follow him...he was crucified!*

*-About the only successful prophet in the Bible was Jonah...and he didn't want to be!*

I guess what I'm trying to say is that your work is not premised upon you being *successful* in convincing the people of anything. Your ministry is to be *faithful* to deliver what "thus says the Lord." At the end of the day God desires, a faithful witness to convey God's word to God's people. God wants you to heed what God says. Remember Lorenzo, *your role is not to be successful. It is to be faithful.*

## **The Prophetic Dimensions of Pastoral Ministry**

I guess one of the things I want to say before I say before I take my seat (always be careful believing a Baptist preacher when he says he is concluding...) is that we should always remember the prophetic dimensions of pastoral ministry. Far too often we get into congregations, and we believe that our job is simply to perform the rituals of the church. We have been taught well in seminary how to preach great sermons, how to pray moving prayers, how to lead great liturgies, how to lift abundant offerings, how to singing stirring songs, *how to make sure that what goes on in the sanctuary in these four walls is done effectively. Seminaries train great priests!*

Far too often, however, we miss out on the point that we have *prophetic responsibilities* as well. We are called to make sure that God's alternative vision comes forward clearly to God's people. The people whom we lead at the end of the day are not just people we want to be proficient adherents of the rituals of the church. No, they are people we want to *think like God thinks, to see the world through the lens of God's possibility, to imagine a different world.* People should leave your services imagining what a world where we ended racism, and we ended poverty, and we ended hatred, and we ended violence and we ended selfishness, and we ended war might look like.

The prophetic dimensions of pastoral ministry calls on our larger society to be better than it is; this is the charge of pastoral ministry. As you enter into this new pastoral ministry, I want to give you this urge to make sure you do not forget that the reason that the world "is" the way it is, may well be in part *because we are failing as Christian ministers to say that it can be otherwise.* In part, the failings

that we see in this world today are because we have limited ourselves to preaching a comfortable message to people who sit silently “behind anesthetizing security of stained glass windows.”

-In part, the world is as it is because people believe that they should be comfortable because clergy have fed them the *theological pablum* of a prosperity gospel, a gospel that they’ve heard that has pushed them to believe that their faith is all about them.

-Others have been comforted by a gospel that is at ease with an unjust status quo that introduced them to a false vision of an American Patriotic Jesus who would be at home in Middle class American suburbia.

-Others still have preached a passive Jesus who is neutral amid the political turmoil in our nation, and sits silently by afraid to take “sides,” afraid to champion the cause of God’s justice, lest he offend big donors! [Must remember what Elie Wiesel said that neutrality always aids the oppressor and never the oppressed. We must choose sides or by our neutrality we are choosing the side of the oppressor!]

But God wants you to remind the people that this is all about God. You are the bearer of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, a poor peasant Palestinian Jew who came from a town whence nothing good can come, who organized a movement of the impoverished and aliens and invalids and unsophisticated outcasts, and who promised them not just the glories of Heaven, but who declared when God’s Kingdom comes, God’s will will be done here *on earth as it is in Heaven!* This is a ministry that has implications for the here and now; this is a ministry that calls for change in the here and now; *this is a ministry that leads the people to work for change in the here and now!*

In this regard, preach a Jesus who is calling not just for the people in your congregation to change, ***but for the world to change!*** Preach a Gospel that offers hope not just for a sweet bye and bye, ***but for a transformed here and now!*** Preach a God who is able to resurrect a man three days in the ground, ***so this God is clearly able not only to change hearts and change minds, but also to change people and policies and procedures and politics and a broken fractured fallen world in need of a Savior!*** Preach this message to those within and those outside of your church. Preach in the sanctuary...and in the city's streets...and in the suites of power in this world. Preach a different story, God's alternative story, the story of hope, the story of change, the story of the possibility of a better world, the story of Jesus!

Yes, Lorenzo preach this radical, remarkable, unbelievable, incomprehensible sacred story because at the end of the day, ***this is the call that you have answered!***