



Trust and Trustability - Serving whole heartedly. 1 Sam.12:13-25
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This term we have been following the lives of several leaders in the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel, which is set at this time of great political and social change for the nation of Israel. Up until this point they had been a federation of tribes, led by appointed 'Judges' including people like Gideon, Samson and Deborah, and lastly the prophet Samuel. As a young boy, God had spoken to Samuel and warned him that religious and political upheaval was on the way but Samuel himself was a man after God's own heart and he led Israel faithfully for his whole life. His sons however, were corrupt, and instead of waiting for God to raise up another Judge and defender at a time of crisis, the people said to Samuel 'give us a king, who will go out before us to fight our battles.' Samuel warned them of the dangers of a Monarchy – a hereditary system where all too easily absolute power corrupts absolutely. Yet the people insisted and continued to ask for a King, just like all the other nations around them. 'Give us a King who will go out and fight our battles for us they said!' Yet the truth is that no mere mortal can save a nation, and as the prophet Samuel came to the end of his life he had one last chance to exhort the people to trust in the Lord, rather than people, systems or idols. It is only as a nation gets its values and trust system right and when we as individuals and communities start fearing the Lord and trusting him that everything else comes into alignment.

1 Samuel 12 Samuel's Farewell Speech

¹³ Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for; see, the LORD has set a king over you. ¹⁴ If you fear the LORD and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the LORD your God – good! ¹⁵ But if you do not obey the LORD, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your ancestors. ¹⁶ Now then, stand still and see this great thing the LORD is about to do before your eyes! ¹⁷ Is it not wheat harvest now? I will call on the LORD to send thunder and rain. And you will realise what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the LORD when you asked for a king.' ¹⁸ Then Samuel called on the LORD, and that same day the LORD sent thunder and rain. So all the people stood in awe of the LORD and of Samuel. ¹⁹ The people all said to Samuel, 'Pray to the LORD your God for your servants so that we will not die, for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king.' ²⁰ 'Do not be afraid,' Samuel replied. 'You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. ²¹ Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. ²² For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own. ²³ As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right. ²⁴ But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. ²⁵ Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will perish.'

We are living in a time of amazing geopolitical upheaval. My son Reuben has recently gone to Plymouth University to study international relations and I suspect his tutors will be busy just trying to keep up to

date with all the changes that are happening globally. It is amazing to think that the long established systems of Western democracy, free trade, capitalism and globalisation are being challenged, and in some areas, found wanting as this internet connected generation wrestles with globally competing approaches and philosophies. As the UK heads towards Brexit it seems the temperature is rising amongst both the opportunists and the doom mongers. Donald Trump had to stop speaking when his speech was ridiculed in the UN earlier this week, and America seems increasingly polarised after the extraordinary scenes in the senate. The tragic tsunami caused by an earthquake in Indonesia is just the latest environmental catastrophe where the number of reported natural disasters has more than doubled since 1985. I wonder how many people are beginning to ask themselves who will step forward to restore order and save us from these calamitous times.

Could Boris Johnson be the answer perhaps? What about Jeremy Corbyn? Certainly the church doesn't seem to be a popular answer - according to a recent Bristol survey now Banksy is a more inspiring representative for British society than anyone in the Church of England.

According to a report called the 'Edelman Trust Barometer' which measures trust levels in a broad range of business, government and media organisations, Britain is 'Divided and Dispirited' with trust levels running very low. Yet I believe this is just the time when ordinary Christians like you and me can bring a message of hope to our demoralised nation.

You see, just over 3000 years ago our bible reading tells us that the nation of Israel was experiencing its own geopolitical trauma. Although for years there were wars and rumours of wars, as different kings played out their own personal power games, yet through all that time God was still working out his bigger plan for humanity. Through all the pain, he was at work engineering the cradle of the incarnation and the birth of the true messiah who would ultimately save the world. The great truth of history is that it really is HIS Story - God bringing all things together for good for those who love him. Whatever we go through as a nation, whether our leaders make good decisions or bad, God can redeem the situation. All is not lost.

November 11th this year marks 100 years since the Armistice at the end of world war 1. There will be special acts of remembrance happening up and down the country. We will be joining the town at Grove Park or at Worle memorial to stand with our community instead of having a 10:30am service on that day. The scripture gift mission has printed a 100th Anniversary edition of the little pocket sized John's gospel that was issued to the troops going to the front, with the message that the war hero Lord Roberts wrote inside:

'25th August 1914. I ask you to put your trust in God. He will watch over you and strengthen you. You will find in this little book guidance when you are in health, comfort when you are in sickness, and strength when you are in adversity.- Roberts'

Trust is still the primary currency of our time. Who do we trust? Do we put our faith in people and systems, or do we put our faith in God who sent Jesus to restore trust between ourselves, God and each other.

In the passage we read, the key phrase that stands out to me is 'do not be afraid.' Even though the people had foolishly asked for a king like the other nations, signalling their lack of trust in God, he did not reject

them or abandon them. Throughout the Christmas story we read those same words 'do not be afraid.' The Angel announced to the lowly shepherds 'do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy, today to you is born in Bethlehem, a saviour who is Christ the Lord.' God himself sent the only saviour and king worth trusting in. Jesus died on the cross and rose again from death to prove his eternal trustability. Samuel told the Israelites: ²⁰ 'Do not be afraid. You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. ²¹ Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. ²² For the sake of his great name the Lord will not reject his people, because the Lord was pleased to make you his own.

Have you ever made a bad decision? I think most of us have. Sometimes we can be so consumed with regrets that we think we are so messed up that God couldn't possibly accept us back. Well that's not true. God's character is such that even when we make stupid mistakes or have been rebellious or stubborn, we are not abandoned or rejected by God. Samuel told the people even while they were living in the consequences of their bad decision 'do not be afraid.' You can still yet turn back to God and serve him wholeheartedly instead. Instead of wallowing in regrets, as we seek the Lord, we can live whole heartedly. That means living with Wholeness. It means living without distrust and division inside. It means being free to trust again. It means we can cast our cares and anxieties on to God knowing that he cares for us.

I think we see four signs of living with wholeness of heart in this passage.

First, living wholeheartedly means not being afraid all the time. Whatever happens, whether we live or die, we are not abandoned.

Second, living wholeheartedly means we have capacity to serve God and follow his commands. Because he is faithful we can trust that he will provide for our needs, even as we give ourselves away.

Third, Living wholehearted lives means we can expect God to guide us. Samuel promised the people that he would teach the people the way that is good and right. He would always pray for them. Well that is exactly what Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would do for us. He called the Holy Spirit the Advocate saying 'when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.'

Fourthly, living wholeheartedly means we recognise the good things that God has done for us – we can be thankful. Samuel said ²⁴ 'But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you.'

I am so thankful that I have breath in my lungs to be able to speak to you today. I'm thankful to be part of such a loving and committed church family. I am so thankful that I am loved and accepted for who I am – that God loves me despite everything. Thank you Lord that I can be thankful today!

I pray we can be a thankful church where even when we are trudging through the mire, we don't have to be afraid, we can continue to serve wholeheartedly.