

“The Next Administration”
1 Samuel 15:34 – 16:13
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4th Sunday after Pentecost
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When Robert E. Lee surrendered the Confederacy on April 9, 1865 news of his surrender did not begin reaching Texas until May. On June 18, more than two months after Lee’s surrender, Union General Gordon Granger reached Galveston Island – a slavery stronghold. The next day he announced that, by Presidential proclamation, all slaves were now free. Because Texas was the last state in the Union to receive such news, many people today suggest that this date – June 19, Juneteenth as it’s become known - should be recognized as the official Emancipation Day for our country.¹

What’s striking to me is the gap between the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation in September of 1862, and its enactment two and a half years later. Freedom was coming, but no one could fully trust it. A new order was coming, but no one could fully rely on it. Justice was on the way, but no one could fully embrace it.

The text today is situated in a similar moment in time. King Saul’s administration is no longer legitimate in the eyes of God. The next administration is already underway. God chooses a new king - an unlikely king – a shepherd boy from a Podunk town named Bethlehem. Not the oldest son, but the youngest. Not a major city, but a tiny town. Not the strongest tribe, but the weakest. And while this next administration will have its own significant issues, it will nonetheless bring the nation more in line with God’s promises, God’s values, and God’s hopes. Israel will have a true shepherd to move it closer to the kingdom that God envisions within the limitations that come with human kingdoms.

Yet even though David is anointed as the next king, Saul will continue to reign for about another 12 years. The nation will recognize Saul as king for another twelve years even though his reign is effectively over. Even though his way is over. Even though his future has already been ended.

If you are living in these in-between times – in between the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation and its enactment; in between the announcement of the end the Saul’s administration and the establishment of the next; I wonder if it makes a difference if you know the hell you are living through can’t last forever. I wonder if it makes a difference if you know that divine authorization for the current administration has already been revoked.

I bet it does make a difference. If all you see is Saul in power, with no ending in sight, there’s not much to hope for. If you buy into the lie that the current king is God-ordained then there’s not much hope for a future. If you believe that every word that comes out of the current king’s mouth is justified by God’s authority, then hope is impossible to find.

¹ The Emancipation Proclamation declared that on January 1, 1863 all slaves in the Confederate

But if you know that God has already revoked divine authority I think you are a lot less likely to obey the morally detestable things that come out of the king's house. Knowing that Saul's decisions are temporary makes you more willing to challenge them. Knowing that Saul's power is not backed by divine power makes you more willing to contest them.

Of course kings are used to claiming divine authority whether they have it or not. That's how Israel's worst kings operate. They surround themselves with lawyers who comb through the holy books looking for proof texts to prove that God is on their side. The Bible calls them false prophets. Usually, they don't last very long. Usually, they're short lived.

But short lived is a misleading term as anyone who has lived through oppression knows. The Israelites lived through 70 years of exile. Black people in this country lived through centuries of slavery. Twelve years is a short time next to these examples. But knowing that God has revoked authorization of any administration that preys on the poor, that oppresses the alien, that forgets the widow, that bears false witness – those core ethical commands that lead to the downfall of one Israelite king after another until the entire nation collapses into exile - knowing that power opposed to God's purposes will not stand forever – that seems to be the basis for hope for anyone who has survived those periods of oppression. The hope imbedded in the spirituals. The knowledge that God's right will be enacted, eventually. The conviction that God's justice will be established, eventually.

And if you are aware that you are living in a transition period then it gives you an opportunity to act differently than if you bought into some king's erroneous claim that God was on his side. You don't have to react so much to the current administration. You don't have to react every time Saul opens his mouth. Only reacting to a failed administration gives a failed king way to much power and puts you in a permanently negative spirit, a permanently reactionary mode. Resisting, arresting, blocking, stopping – those are all oppositional words. If you know that the Davidic administration is on the way out then you can do more than resist, arrest, block or stop. You can imagine, create, organize, prepare, anticipate – hopeful, constructive, creative energy. You can embrace the poor, raise up the downtrodden, listen to those who have been maligned, welcome the stranger, support the weak.

That's the kind of energy that God brings to the situation. The next administration is a creative act on the part of God. David comes from the margins. He has no credentials. He has no social claim. The anointing of David, Walter Brueggemann writes is a celebration "that among the marginal there are beautiful people, that among the little ones there is the potential for greatness. In the hearing of the story are the seeds of hope for all those who joined the company and the narrated imagination of David."² An imaginative act.

This is not to say that resisting, arresting, blocking, and stopping aren't productive actions that need to be taken to keep the Saul's power in check. It's just a reminder that if you know the moral arc of the universe is bending toward justice, you need to have a vision of where that arc is headed, of what justice looks like:

² Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, (Louisville: John Knox Press), 1990, pp. 123-124.

visions that you can celebrate and begin to enact in anticipation of the kingdom that is to come.

And maybe in the current world that means balancing the steps that we take to oppose injustice with actions we take to promote the world that is to come. Maybe it means that as we reject and condemn the current administration's policy for ripping children from their families at the border, we take new steps to extending hospitality to the immigrants who are living among us. As we reject the rise of white supremacy and the 3rd Reconstruction we take new steps to build a church community that lives into a multi-racial vision of inclusion. As we reject the dismantling of common sense protections of the earth, we take new steps to reduce our own carbon footprints, plant gardens and native plants, invest in fossil fuels. As we reject the violence in our streets, we take new steps to listen to young people who have told many of us what leads them to embrace those streets. As we reject police corruption we take new steps to build relationships with the officers in our own neighborhoods. We balance what God calls us to resist, arrest, block, and stop with what God calls us to imagine, create, organize, prepare, anticipate and embrace.

Because God has already given us visions for what the world is going to look like. A banquet table where everyone is invited. A new community where everyone sits under their own fig tree and no one is afraid. A new temple where eunuchs and foreigners are given a name and a place as good as sons and daughters of God. A church that brings together Jew and Gentile, male and female and trans and queer and gay and straight and black, brown, and white, and young and old. God has given us those visions that will be enacted in some future administration to come.

We are living in between. And who knows how long the current hell will last. 2 more years? 6? 12? 70? A lifetime? No one knew how much time would pass between the Emancipation Proclamation and its enactment. We don't get that information. We just get the clarity that no tyrant opposed by God will last forever. Injustice cannot stand forever. Death cannot stand forever. God won't allow it. Divine authorization for the way of fear, greed, hate, and exclusion has been revoked. The next administration is already on the way. What are you doing to prepare for it?