

"I pledge allegiance to ??” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
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1 Samuel 8

Let us pray: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

When I was in grade school we used to start each day saying the Pledge of Allegiance. I'm sure most all of you remember the words: I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Many of you may remember that the words 'under God' were added in 1954.

Pledge allegiance? What exactly does that mean? Allegiance. 'devotion or loyalty to a person, group, or cause' is one definition. When we say the Pledge, we're showing our loyalty to the US government.

It seems that in today's Old Testament lesson the Hebrew people were confused about who they owed allegiance to. Up until their request for a king to rule them, God had been their king. They pledged their allegiance to God; the God who had raised up leaders – Moses, Joshua, and the judges to lead them from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land and lead them in the process of settling and defending the Promised Land.

But now things evidently weren't going too well for them. There was war between the various tribes. The country was in disarray. It's not stated in these verses, but most likely the various Hebrew tribes pledged allegiance to their tribe and didn't care to get along the other tribes. As the Bible says in the Book of Judges there was no king in Israel in those days and everyone did as they saw fit.

So, we read that the people were grumbling and proposed a solution to Samuel. The people wanted a king, so they could be like other nations. They thought the king would be the solution to their problems.

We just finished the primary in California and now the top candidates will start campaigning in earnest. What is the most common idea you'll hear expressed by each candidate? "Things are not good, the way we do things is not efficient and effective, government is messed up, the system is broken – and, if you elect me, I can solve all the problems." And there are plenty of people who will tell you that their candidate can solve the problems that are plaguing our society.

We may not have a king in the USA, but the grumbling and complaints like those expressed by the Israelites are alive and well in 2018. Likewise, there are people who have a solution for the grumbling and complaints. There's always a hope for someone better for us to pledge our allegiance to!

When that person is elected, do things get 'better'? God warned the Hebrew people that the king would take their food, their slaves, their sons and daughters and the king would tax them. Did things get better for the Hebrew people after God gave them a king? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. However, whether the king was a good king or a

bad king, the king took their food, their slaves, their sons and daughters and their money in the form of taxes.

The Hebrew people wanted a king. God was not enough for them. Is that true for us today? Is God good enough for you – all the time?

As Christ-followers, we view God as our ultimate leader. We pledge allegiance to God and try to apply our faith in all situations in our lives. But we may, at times, feel that God is not enough. If only God would straighten out the mess the world is in today. I've heard that said many times.

There's a story about a youngster who was frightened by a thunder and lightning storm in the middle of the night. Hearing the child's cry, the dad came into the room to comfort the child with these words, "Don't worry, God will take care of you." To which the child replied, "I want someone with skin on!"

How often we'd like God to be standing beside us with skin on. The Hebrew people wanted a God with skin on as well. Someone to bring them together, to fight the enemy. Someone to be their leader.

Is God not enough for you and me? Do we need a God with skin on? I think our Great God is enough, and we have that God with skin on already with us.

In the aftermath of the terrible tragedy last November in Sutherland Springs, Texas, where a gunman opened fire on a worshipping congregation in a small Baptist church, killing 26 and wounding 20, *Christianity Today* published an article about research that shows that "people of faith, particularly those who receive support from their churches and religious communities, fare better in their recovery." The article continues: "After a mass shooting, people who felt supported by their religious communities ultimately experienced fewer symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and their faith didn't suffer as much. Researchers found that even when the suffering is greater, survivors with high levels of support from their faith communities don't show the level of worsening symptoms experienced by people without such community." (Homiletics Online, When God is not enough)

Isn't this finding really about a God with skin on? When in pain and need, we can let the Christian community minister to us. We can see and feel through their actions that God is enough, that God does have skin on. The community is being God's hands and feet here on earth.

The Hebrew people could have taken care of each other and loved each other – loved their neighbor as themselves – but they elected not to. They looked to someone other than God to take care of them. Their allegiance was to the king, not so much to God.

What about you? Is God enough for you? Is your allegiance to a political party, a candidate, a president? Or is it to the God? Are you caring for others? Are you putting skin on God for this world today? I pray that is the case. History wasn't too kind to the Hebrew people when they chose to have a king like all their neighbors. Which route will you take? King or God? Who do you pledge allegiance to?