

Knox Presbyterian Church, Manotick
1 Samuel 22: 1-5, Mark 1-6
Rev. Dr. Jonathan Dent, preacher

April 14, 2024

“Sad and Hopeful”

Thank you for having me here today. I have some connection with you over the years. I want to tell you something of that connection. Then I want to tell you something of how I became a Christian. Then I would like to briefly exposit the two shorter passages of Scripture from 1 Samuel and Mark.

I first learned of Manotick through Gerry Saracen when I was serving as a student pastor in Aylmer, Quebec. Gerry and Gordon Kouwenberg and I were serving at the three geographically outermost congregations of the Presbytery of Ottawa in 1983. Gerry was here. Gordon was in Grace, Orleans, where I served this last five years. I remember Gerry... How many people were here in the congregation in 1983? Raise your hands.

I also served at St. John's, Cornwall with Fred Rennie as the Senior Minister there in the early '90s. I led a youth group to come up here to Manotick for a rally in around 1993. How many people were here during that time, about ten years later than my first contact here?

All of you who have been here in this congregation since those years have a very significant investment in this place and consequently in the denomination, even if you would say being Presbyterian is the least important part of being here. The family here at Knox has been through some sad times in the last five years. So have I and Grace Church, Orleans. You've just lost your pastor Phil, whom you loved, at least as far as I could tell from last week, and you are wondering about your future. Some of you may even be wondering about staying in the congregation, going somewhere else or just staying home. I want to try and help you process what you have gone through over these next five weeks of speaking here and ultimately lead you back to the Lord in the midst of your sadness and loss. In Him we have hope and a future. Apart from Him, we have nothing. (John 15:5) You should know that you are not alone in going through what you are going through, but many congregations are experiencing what you are experiencing, and not only in the Presbyterian church, but across the body of Christ.

Before we get into the Scripture passages, let me express something of my own faith journey. I understand that on the African continent, no Christian speaker is allowed to simply preach, but must give some testimony to how he or she became a Christian.

I grew up in a high Anglican church in S. California. I was baptized and confirmed there. But my family, like many families, did not experience a vibrant relationship with Christ. It was a Sunday thing. My two older brothers quickly left the church. My father left the church over church politics. Can you imagine? So when we moved to N. California when I was in high school, I no longer went to church. But God wasn't finished with me. Some of my music class friends invited me to a home Bible study. From the Scriptures and from the small group, there I learned that I was loved, not only by God, but by those friends and new companions. They loved me even when I was making off colour jokes at the Bible study. Through that group I understood that Christianity is not just a Sunday church thing. It is a lively relationship with God through Jesus Christ, where sinners, people with problems, issues and addictions can come to know God personally, repenting of their rebellion against God and publicly acknowledging Jesus as Lord and Saviour, Master, Teacher and Friend. I did that at a large Presbyterian Church, at first in my small group, then in my teen group, which was about 400 teens from seven high schools, and then at the front of the church in 1974. Now how many people were here in this congregation in 1974? Just wondering. You've seen a lot here, if you've been here 50 or 25 or 5 years or you just came today. God is on the move. Do not lose your perspective of what He is doing. Join Him where He is working. Trust Him. Give your life to Jesus anew or for the first time today. Don't hold back. He knows what you need. Tell Him that you know you are a sinner and a rebel to Him, and that you want to go His way. Turn to His love and away from your sins, accept and agree with Jesus as the Way the Truth and the Life (John 14: 1-6), give your life to Him, your relationships, your family, your decisions, your future, your health, give it all to Him. I did that in 1974, but doing this is a daily decision to follow Him, trust Him, and depend on Him. We all need guidance and care. We all need to be saved from our sins. Jesus died on the cross for you and rose from the dead to show He does have the power to lead you now and into eternity beyond this mortal life into eternal life, right now. We will have a time at the end to pray a prayer to receive and trust Jesus anew. This is the critical part of everything that I will say. In fact,

you can tune out now and do business with Jesus and that's okay if that's what you need to do right now. Take a quiet moment.

1 Samuel 22. The context for this passage is the establishment of the kingship in Israel, rejecting God as king, establishing Saul as king, and then God rejecting Saul after Saul refuses to follow God's word and direction. So David is anointed king quietly, but is waiting for God's timing as he continues in both his musical abilities and worship, as well as his military exploits and victories. David excels at all he does. God is with him. God guides him as he prays. But Saul, on the other hand, is moving farther and farther away from God to the point that his rebellion brings forth a "harmful spirit." (1 Sam. 16:15) It gets so bad that Saul begins to believe that David is his enemy and so Saul starts to try to murder him, first in person (1 Sam. 19:10) with a javelin and then by sending out what we might call today in S. America, "death squads." In short, he is sending out his army to murder David. In fact, later in chapter 22, Saul has Doeg kill 85 priests on the spot because Saul believes they are co-conspirators with David, but they have done nothing to merit execution. Imagine the whole Synod of E. Ontario & Quebec, being executed at one of its meetings.

So David knows he has to hide or at least find shelter, but he also knows that it is difficult to hide and find shelter, particularly as God has drawn many people to David. Verse 2 tells us about four hundred men were there, and likely that excludes counting the women and children in their families as is often the case in Scripture, so probably we can increase that four fold, because of a wife and two children. So think 1600 people. That cave in Adullam was pretty big.

Adullam is halfway between Gath and Bethlehem in the Judean mountains, where there are quite a few caves and that makes it easier to hide, even with large groups of people. But David didn't want his family to be caught in a military operation, so he sent his mom and dad and his brothers to the king of Edom, a lengthy journey and a descent of 3,000 feet from the mountains to east of the Dead Sea, whether Ruth his great-grandmother used to live. Now you know if you've read 1 Samuel that David and his brothers were not on the best terms, re-read chapter 17 where David defeats Goliath, particularly verses 28-29, if you are in doubt of that. And even his dad Jesse didn't present David to Samuel for anointing at the beauty pageant in his home, as he was the youngest and the least. Nevertheless, David cares for his family. And we should do the same.

In these days of uncertainty, it is a good time to care for others who are affected by your decisions: such as, Where you go to church. What elements of worship are most important: Scripture reading, prayers, musical worship, preaching, theology and the preacher. All these things are important. Ask the Lord what is most important to Him for you, rather than simply depending on your feelings. And where you have not cared for your family, in the midst of church issues, and personal sins of many kinds, ask forgiveness. I have put my family through much more than they deserve over the years in the PCC. My wife and my daughters have all borne the brunt of my decisions. We've moved a lot. We've been through a lot. I've chosen the church and church emergencies over my family. I hope they will forgive. We are still going through processing finding a church in retirement and it is hard to do so. Can I simply say, there aren't any perfect churches, and don't join the one that is perfect, because when you join it, it won't be perfect anymore? The issue(s) that we have faced in the PCC is being faced all over in many churches. None of us can hide from conflict, but we can be prepared and care for one another by talking about what is going on, and making decisions together, in the physical family, in God's family, in the church family. Because you know the Church is larger than this denomination and this congregation. You know God sees a church bigger than the one we see. Join Him. Trust Him. You may not know there are 600 Christian congregations in Ottawa. The PCC has twenty or so. The RCC has 100 or so. I'm not saying I am recommending any of these. I am saying there is a significant number of churches here. Let us continue to pray for our congregation here but also for the larger body of Christ, here and around the world.

So David looked after his family, even when it was costly, and as he followed God, others followed him. The Scriptures give three groups in verse 2.

- 1) Those who are in distress. What is "distress"? The online dictionary simply states it is: extreme anxiety, sorrow or pain, including elements of anguish, suffering, ache and torment. Today we call this a mental health issue. When we are in distress we often shut down or go numb, or seek out numbing activities. Distress is exactly where the devil wants to see our family and our congregation exist. Distress means we don't know where to turn or what to do. And do you know what to do when you don't know what to do? When you don't know what to do, say a simple prayer. "I don't know what to do, Lord. I am frozen. I'm

- not sure where to go, who to see, or how to get help. Please help me find what I need to find peace in You instead of distress.” It is good to find someone to help you find God and what God is doing in this distressing circumstance. That’s what some of the men in David’s time were coming to David to do. They knew David followed God. They knew he worshipped God, got guidance from God and God’s word. They knew he had victories in battles: personally with Goliath, in battles with the Philistines and others, and now although Saul was after him, they knew he would lead them to God and God’s will. Isn’t that in part why we come to church? We need to hear God and God’s word in the midst of our distress. So what happens when the church itself is a part of the distress? We need to continue to find ways with friends and family and small groups to hear God. He is constantly speaking in the Scriptures, if we would but take the time to listen. The broadcast is ongoing. But we need to be still enough to hear it.
- 2) The second group was in debt. They didn’t have the money or the work they needed so they decided to join David as he follows God, and as he establishes a new government. The current government, Saul’s government, had an evil spirit, and was going away from God. There was hope that the next government would bring hope, righteousness and good things to all. Sound familiar? No matter what debt crisis you face personally, and what debt crisis we face as Canadians with some crazy number such as 175% more debt than income, think about that for a moment, even though a lot has to do with mortgages. And that is when the Bank of Canada rate is at 5%, remember when it was at 19.5%. That was about this time in 1981 under Mr. Trudeau Sr.’s second term. Debt is relative. But when we either owe or can’t pay, we know we are needy. When you are needy, get help. Ask for help in the appropriate place, where someone will help you or refer you to someone, like a debt counsellor who will actually help. In the church, join a small group, not because it is good for the church, but because it is good for you. Receive prayer from individuals and groups. Don’t stay alone in your need. Get help. It takes courage to be vulnerable enough to ask for help but it is worth it.
 - 3) The third group of men is described as those who were “bitter in soul.” May I simply say here that I prefer the ESV translation to the NIV, which I have used for years publicly and know is in the pew here. It is a little more literal than the NIV. Rather than the simple and vaguer word “discontent,” it gives a sense of how bitter and disillusioned they were. Can I say that I am quite bitter and

disillusioned at the PCC? They have said there is a place for both conservative and liberals in the denomination but then act as if the conservatives are the losers and if they don't like it, they can leave. And many have. I myself have given my whole adult life to the denomination and a number of my friends and colleagues simply have turned their backs on me in national settings and personal situations. I feel betrayed by the denomination, while going through the losses of those who leave and those who stay but tell me I am not wanted. So the question is how do I work through my feelings of betrayal? How did Jesus work with Judas over those years of ministry and not become embittered? I want to explore this a little bit more in coming sermons but as you can see I am out of time for today.

And I don't have time to look at Mark 3: 1-6 this week, but will during my next visit on April 28. Here we find Jesus angry and grieved at the religious leaders' hardness of heart. I want to look at what we do when we get angry, as opposed to what Jesus does. I also want to take some time to look at our own hardness of heart through what we have gone through in the last weeks and years.

The three groups are also a way of looking at outreach and vision: distress, debt and discontent. Reach out to these and you will be doing well as a congregation. I trust the time spent with David today will help you admit to the Lord what you are going through, whether distress or debt or bitter discontent or something else. Let us bring all of what we are going through to the Lord.

Let us pray.