

Call to Worship: Psalm 24

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;  
for God founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?

The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.

They will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God their Savior.

Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob.

Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

Who is he, this King of glory? The Lord Almighty— he is the King of glory.

Prayer of Approach

*Our Lord and Ruler, your name is wonderful everywhere on earth!*

*You let your glory be seen. in the heavens above. Psalm 8:1 (CEV)*

As we come to you in worship, we come looking for your reign O God,

As we come to you in worship, we come looking for signs of your kingdom.

As we come to you in worship, we come praying that your kingdom would grow within us.

As we come to you in worship, we come believing that your kingdom will come through us.

As we come to you in worship, we hope that your kingdom will be seen in our words in actions.

*Our Lord and Ruler, your name is wonderful everywhere on earth!*

*You let your glory be seen. in the heavens above. Psalm 8:1 (CEV)*

Prayer of Confession

O God our King, as we come to worship today, we come recognizing how many sovereigns we worship.  
Therefore, O God, we ask that you would give us a word of authority and remind us of your good and perfect reign above all things.

We confess O God, that we choose to make many good things into 'gods' in our lives. We confess that we choose for ourselves heroes to worship and villains to condemn when we know that all is under your Word, O God. For we are no judge, we are servants and labourers of your Kingdom. We confess, O God, that we need renewing and reminding that you are God, alone worthy to be worshipped and adored. We confess, O God, that we need you and we come confessing knowing that we stand forgiven through the gospel actions of Jesus our saviour. O God, give us peace in the silence of these confessions ...

Hear our petition O God,

*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

*Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.*

*Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Psalm 51:10-12 (NIV)*

Hear our prayers, O God, through Christ we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Friends in Christ, we are forgiven people, set free from our past failures to make a fresh start this day and every day. The Holy Spirit empowers us to love God and to love others. Thanks be to God for such everlasting mercy and grace!

**Hymn # 441 *Can a Little Child like Me***

1. Can a little child like me thank the Father fittingly? Yes, O yes! be good and true, patient, kind in all you do; love the Lord and do your part; learn to say with all your heart,

***Refrain: Father, we thank thee! Father, we thank thee! Father in heaven, we thank thee!***

2. For the fruit upon the tree, for the birds that sing of thee, for the earth in beauty dressed, father, mother, and the rest, for thy precious, loving care, for thy bounty ev'rywhere,

***Refrain: Father, we thank thee! Father, we thank thee! Father in heaven, we thank thee!***

3. For the sunshine warm and bright, for the day and for the night, for the lessons of our youth – honor, gratitude, and truth – for the love that met us here, for the home and for the cheer,

***Refrain: Father, we thank thee! Father, we thank thee! Father in heaven, we thank thee!***

4. For our comrades and our plays, and our happy holidays, for the joyful work and true that a little child may do, for our lives but just begun, for the great gift of thy Son,

***Refrain: Father, we thank thee! Father, we thank thee! Father in heaven, we thank thee!***

Prayer of Approach

Lord God send us your Holy Spirit as we listen to the scriptures this day. Open our ears to hear your Word speaking in these words. Open our hearts to receive your Word and respond in love and service for Christ's sake. Amen

Scripture: 1 Samuel 8:1-22 (Israel Asks for a King)

When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.

So, all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, *"You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."*

But when they said, *"Give us a king to lead us,"* this displeased Samuel; so, he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him: *"Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights."*

Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, *"This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day."*

But the people refused to listen to Samuel. *"No!"* they said. *"We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."*

When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the Lord. The Lord answered, *“Listen to them and give them a king.”*

Then Samuel said to the Israelites, *“Everyone go back to your own town.”*

**May God add blessing to the reading of this word.**

### Sermon

I grew up in the 1980's during the tail end of the Cold War. It was at times scary. Because of the very philosophy that if we could build enough bombs to blow each other up a thousand times over, then surely we wouldn't, right?

Of course from out of that philosophy came the fear, what if? What if there was an accident of some kind, a false alarm, a computer glitch that propelled us all to war?

This led to movies like Dr. Strangelove and War Games. There were of course a whole host of popular songs written about the fear of an accidental start to hostilities that would guarantee the mutual destruction of all involved.

I think my favourite is called 99 Red Balloons by a German artist named Nena. It starts off with the purchase of 99 red balloons that are sent off into the sky as playful symbol of fun or joy or youthful playfulness. Some early warning radar system identifies them as hostile ... Here is the verse...

*Ninety-nine red balloons  
Floating in the summer sky  
Panic bells, it's red alert  
There's something here from somewhere else  
The war machine springs to life*

The song is a dark farce making fun of our destructive path to self preservation. But that song has changed meaning to me now. Today I think of it as dark farce making fun of how we mindlessly destroy our natural environment. This came to me when I watched a video about some naturalists cutting rope off from around a seal pup. The rope, as it turned out, was actually bundled string that twisted its way up to what was left of a group of balloons. I doubt there were 99 and I couldn't tell if any were red, but it made me wonder if what will actually kill us is our lack of mindfulness when it comes to the environment. And it made me wonder if poor Nena would be labelled a natural disaster.

It's funny how things change politically. What used to scare us has left our collective conscience and something that used to be a sign of fun and innocence, like releasing balloons, is now understood to be an environmental sin. Maybe you don't agree with me, but pretend you do because it leads me to a question for you all. With all the election talk ramping up in BC and indeed in many places, I was wondering ... and here is the question ...

What do you think might be God place in all these elections?

I have often heard that friends and family should never discuss religion or politics so this sermon may not make for appropriate dinner conversation. Yet, I think if we are all being honest, whether your religion is Christianity or if our religion is the environment or even if you understand these two doctrines to be as indivisible as the Holy Trinity, there seems little hope in keeping religion out of politics these days.

I will move away from environmental concerns here, but to say only that I worry that the environmental crisis might be our generation's blind spot leaving future generations to reconcile the economy with degraded Earth. But what I want to focus on is something that comes from the text we just heard read.

The Ancient Israelites want a King. They want him to be big and powerful. They want him to subdue other nations. They want him to be just and merciful among them. It sounds like they want God, but they choose Saul. Ironically, the Biblical narrative says that all they were looking for was God, but they instead chose Saul.

But don't you think that this is ironic? Because I can't believe how many times I have heard the word god invoked... as being sent from god... anointed by god... to come and save us politically or to save the environment for that matter. But without getting on a specific platform I want to address the god-talk.

Remember, why did God send Saul to the Israelites?

Was it to bless them? No, God is the source of every blessing.

Was it to save them? Only from the Philistines. But then again, remember who actually saved Israel from Goliath. Hint: It wasn't Saul.

Why, did God send Saul? To be God's own messenger? To be a just and true king?

No, clearly not.

God sent Saul because they elected him. God says to Samuel in verse 7, ***And the Lord told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king."***

Friends, I am not saying don't vote. Vote with your conscience. Vote with your convictions. But don't expect a political leader to be able to change the world. In fact, to me, God sent Saul to the Ancient Israelites, not to bless them but to show them how foolish it is to put their trust in another human being when instead they should trust God.

Again, in sending Saul to the Ancient Israelites, God sums up this way: *you want it, you got it!*

I think sermons on why Saul was sent to the Ancient Israelites should be a staple in modern democracies when elections approach. Unfortunately for the modern democracy I think the best for unity is found in a centrist party. But you know what we get, bland and boring. But hey maybe that is the best we can hope for better than alternatives from the far wings of the political spectrum.

So, if you can't tell already, while it is my patriotic duty to vote, I do not put much hope in the political process. I feel like our political process is more predictable than a Presbyterian meeting... with half the vision. It isn't that politics cannot make a difference, good politicians make good policy and stewardship decisions. But honestly how much should we expect from other human beings?

So... are we without hope. No never.

And here is where I think the Good News is. Though God was rejected as King, God still sent the Prince of Peace, Jesus, not to tax us and take the best lands and produce from us... but to give himself to us... in order to remind us of our standing invitation in the King's house... where is better... one day... than thousands elsewhere.

Remember, God gave Saul to the Israelites because they basically elected him. But here it was is also true in the Christian faith. Presbyterians believe in this theological doctrine called election. We say that salvation rests in the truth that God elects us to salvation in Jesus Christ. This is Good News.

But our election in Christ is all about today too. It is about how we spiritually vote our decisions into realities. What I mean is don't you like a politician who keeps her promises? That the vote you cast becomes a promise fulfilled. Then spiritually, our votes become the promises we keep to our king.

To walk in justice. To love our neighbour. To clothe the person who is cold and feed the one who is hungry. Steward the environment and work for sustainable economies. This is what we vote for as Christians. This is what we are elected to in Christ.

So vote those good doctrines in action and together we will fulfill the promises of the Kingdom of God and so many will rejoice at the great banquet. And at that great banquet, I believe balloons will again be politically correct as a sign of joyful celebration and youthful innocence. I believe that is a truth that will never change. Amen

#### Invitation to the Offering

When we gather together as God's Church, we enjoy the gifts of so many other followers of Jesus, offered to him over so many centuries. Now our gifts join theirs so that God will be praised, and Jesus' love spread in this generation and those to come after.

#### Prayer of Dedication

Generous God, you are both faithful and fruitful as you embrace each generation of your people. Bless our gifts and make them fruitful beyond our imagining in the work of your kingdom. Keep us faithful in our generation so that the inheritance we have received in Christ will continue in generations yet to come. Amen

#### Prayers of the People

Faithful God and Holy Friend, we do not have enough words to thank you for all you have given us and the love you share with us in Christ Jesus. In the silence of this time, help us review the week just past, remembering the ways we encountered you—in the beauty of creation, the support of friends, the wisdom of books, the joy of music, the energy of exercise, through study and prayer. (A time of silence is kept.)

God of comfort and challenge, we are grateful for your presence in these uncertain times at home, at work and at school. We give you thanks for your attention to the small details and the large responsibilities we face. Be with us as the months of pandemic continue. Give us patience to keep each other safe and make us attentive to the needs of those around us. In silence we name before you those finding these days especially difficult. (*A time of silence is kept.*)

God of persistence and inspiration, we remember before you the many who struggle to recognize your presence or fail to hear your voice amid all the competing voices in our world. We pray for those feeling depressed or anxious, those facing grief and loneliness, and those who are worried about their health or their security. (*A time of silence is kept.*)

Do not forget these people even if they forget you. Comfort them and fill them with peace.

God of justice and leadership, we pray for our country and all other nations facing immense challenges with COVID-19. Guide decision makers and keep the hearts of those with resources open to those who do not have enough. We pray for places where justice is lacking, where violence threatens, or leaders are untrustworthy. Strengthen voices of wisdom and acts of courageous compassion to tend the needs of people most at risk.

God of grace and guidance, you call us to be your hands and feet, your voice and comfort in the world, following the example of Jesus. Equip us to respond to the needs around us in his name and make us bold to get started right here and right now. For we dare to pray the words Jesus taught us... **Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.**

**Hymn # 704 Teach me God to Wonder**

1. Teach me, God, to wonder; teach me, God, to see; let your world of beauty capture me.  
Praise to you be given; love for you be lived, life be celebrated; joy you give.
2. Let me, God, be open; let me loving be; let your world of people speak to me.  
Praise to you be given; love for you be lived, life be celebrated; joy you give.

**Benediction: Psalm 47:5-9**

God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets. Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted.

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***A Great Cloud of Witnesses<sup>i</sup>***

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century was a tremendous movement of spiritual and ecclesiastical renewal that called the church back to its biblical and evangelical roots. As heirs of this great tradition, we own afresh the principles for which our forebears in the faith struggled, and by which they lived and died.

*Sola Gratia* – by grace alone

*We have been made for joy: joy in knowing, loving and serving God, joy in knowing, loving and serving one another, joy in the wonder of all God's works.*

*This purpose for our lives can be achieved only through God's unmerited favour, freely bestowed by God through Jesus Christ, who is the only way of salvation for all people everywhere. As heralds of God's gracious love, we are called to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ throughout the world.*

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by divine Grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [Rom. 3: 23-24]*

*Sola Fide* – by faith alone

*We respond to God's initiative in salvation through personal trust in the Redeemer. We are made right with God by faith alone, which means that we belong – body and soul, in life and in death, not to ourselves but to our faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ, who has fully paid for all our sins and makes us whole heartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.*

*Know that a person is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So, we too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. [Gal. 2: 16]*

*Sola Scriptura* – the scriptures alone

*God speaks to us through the Bible and calls us to faith and obedience. At the same time the Bible is also a human word and its writing was conditioned by the language, thought, and setting of its time. The Bible is the primary rule of faith and life – the standard of all teaching in the church by which we test any word that comes to us from tradition, world, or inner experience.*

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that all God's people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. [2 Tim. 3: 16-17]*

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. [Heb 12: 1-2]*

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<sup>i</sup> Service adapted from *Reformed Worship*, Number 92, pages 38-39. Some readings taken from *A Catechism for Today*, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2006