

June 16, 2019

1 Samuel 21:1-9

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Books of Samuel, 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel, form part of the narrative history of Israel in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. Together with the books Joshua, Judges, and Kings, they constitute a theological history of the Israelites and aim to explain God's law for Israel under the guidance of the prophets. The book of Samuel begins with the origin story of Samuel, the prophet/priest who consecrates the first Israelite King Saul, who is replaced by David. Our section today deals with the story as David begins to understand that God is calling him to be king in the place of Saul, because the latter no longer depends upon God, obsessed and satisfied with his own monarchical greatness.

Nob: a village near Jerusalem, at this time in the history of the Israelites this was where the Tabernacle was located. The tabernacle (Hebrew: מִשְׁכָּן, mishkān, meaning "residence" or "dwelling place"), also known as the Tent of the Congregation (מִוֶּעֵד אֱלֹהִים, *ōhel mō'ēd*, also Tent of Meeting, etc.), was the portable earthly dwelling place of Yahweh (God) used by the children of Israel from the Exodus until the conquest of Canaan. It was constructed of 4 woven layers of curtains and 48 15 foot tall standing wood boards overlaid in gold and held in place by its bars and silver sockets and was richly furnished with valuable materials taken from Egypt at God's orders. Moses was instructed at Mount Sinai to construct and transport the tabernacle with the Israelites on their journey through the wilderness and their subsequent conquest of the Promised Land. After 440 years, Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem superseded it as the dwelling-place of God.

Ahimelech came trembling: suspecting some extraordinary occurrence by David appearing so suddenly, and in such a style, for David's attendants were left at a little distance. The preceding chapter tells us that David has departed the kingdom, at odds with the king Saul,....

for there was no bread there: in the tabernacle. The removal of the old and the substitution of the new bread was done on the Sabbath (Leviticus 24:8), the loaves being kept warm in an oven heated the previous day.

bread of the Presence, Showbread (Hebrew: לֶחֶם הַפָּנִים lechem haPānīm, literally: "Bread of the Presence"), in the King James Version: shewbread, in a biblical or Jewish context, refers to the cakes or loaves of bread which were always

¹ David came to **Nob** to the priest Ahimelech. *Ahimelech came trembling* to meet David, and said to him, "Why are you alone, and no one with you?" ² David said to the priest Ahimelech, "The king has charged me with a matter, and said to me, 'No one must know anything of the matter about which I send you, and with which I have charged you.' I have made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place. ³ Now then, what have you at hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever is here." ⁴ The priest answered David, "I have no ordinary bread at hand, only **holy bread** —provided that the young men have kept themselves from women." ⁵ David answered the priest, "Indeed women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition; the vessels of the young men are holy even when it is a common journey; how much more today will their vessels be holy?" ⁶ So the priest gave him the **holy bread**; *for there was no bread there* except the **bread of the Presence**, which is removed from before the Lord, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.

⁷ Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord; his name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's shepherds.

⁸ David said to Ahimelech, "Is there no spear or sword here with you? I did not bring my sword or my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste." ⁹ The priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah, is here wrapped in a cloth **behind the ephod**; if you will take that, take it, for there is none here except that one." David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."

Matthew 12:1-8

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¹ At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the *Sabbath*; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. ² When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on *the Sabbath*." ³ [Jesus] said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? ⁴ He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests. ⁵ Or have you not read in the law that on the *Sabbath* the priests in the temple break the *Sabbath* and yet are guiltless? ⁶ I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸ **FOR THE SON OF MAN IS LORD OF THE *Sabbath*.**"

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- What word, phrase or image grabs your attention?
- What was God's intention for the Bread of the Presence? How did David conform to it?
- What was God's intention for the sabbath? How can Jesus and the Pharisees disagree about what that means for daily living?
- What do these stories have to do with the sacrament of communion?
- How do the word of these stories touch - our life as individuals and as the church here in Oakland - today?

...present on a specially dedicated table, in the Temple in Jerusalem as an offering to God. An alternative, and more appropriate, translation would be presence bread, since the Bible requires that the bread be constantly in the presence of God (Exodus 25:30). It is also mentioned in (Matthew 12:4) (τ ο ὕς ἄρτους τῆς προθέσεως).

behind the ephod --in the place allowed for keeping the sacred vestments, of which the ephod is mentioned as the chief. The giant's sword was deposited in that safe custody as a memorial of the divine goodness in delivering Israel.

In the book of Matthew (*telling the story of Jesus*), one of the chief areas of conflict between Jesus and his opponents was in keeping the Sabbath. In this passage, Jesus is criticized by religious leaders for allowing his followers to pluck and eat grain on the Sabbath. The Pharisees regarded this as work, which was forbidden on the Sabbath. Jesus dismisses both their interpretation and their motivation.

his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat: The law of Israel allowed people traveling through an area to glean enough grain for a small meal from fields in the area (Deuteronomy 23:25). Farmers were commanded to not completely harvest their crops to leave a little behind for the sake of travelers and the poor. "When you come into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor's standing grain." Deuteronomy 23:25. No Biblical law prohibited the plucking of grain in order to eat on the Sabbath. What was prohibited was labor for the sake of profit. Thus, a farmer could not harvest for profit on the Sabbath, but an individual could glean enough grain to eat. So, the Pharisees are either picking and choosing what parts of the Torah Law they want to emphasize, or they are out of touch with how God provides for the poor. In any case, it shows their un-awareness of what's going on, and God's priorities.

the Sabbath: how to observe this holy day of rest is spelled out in the 10 Commandments. It's the only law that changes in the two times they appear in the Hebrew Bible.

⁸ Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰ But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹ **For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore** the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

– Exodus 20:8-11

More notes

¹² Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁴ But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. ¹⁵ Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and ***the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore*** the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

While the two versions of the commandments say to observe the Sabbath (day of rest) as holy, one insists upon such restful observation as a remembrance of God's creative work in Genesis 1, while the other points back to the members of God's deliverance of the Israelites from their enslavement in Egypt – where they never got any rest. In both cases the reference is back to what God has done, who God is and what God is about. It's a way for the people, in their observation of the Sabbath, to recall that God calls them (us!) to live differently....

bread of the Presence: meant only for the priests to eat as per Leviticus 24:5-9 “⁵ You [this is an instruction to all of Israel] shall take choice flour, and bake twelve loaves of it; two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf. ⁶ You shall place them in two rows, six in a row, on the table of pure gold. ⁷ You shall put pure frankincense with each row, to be a token offering for the bread, as an offering by fire to the Lord. ⁸ Every sabbath day Aaron shall set them in order before the Lord regularly as a commitment of the people of Israel, as a covenant forever. ⁹ ***They shall be for Aaron and his descendants, who shall eat them in a holy place,*** for they are most holy portions for him from the offerings by fire to the Lord, a perpetual due.”