

Raising an Ebenezer
1 Samuel 7:3-17
Peace

If I say Ebenezer, my hunch is Ebenezer Scrooge is the first thing that comes to mind! We aren't focusing on that Ebenezer tonight. A hymn that is sung occasionally is number 807 in our hymnal. Look at it for just a minute, especially verse, "Here I raise my Ebenezer: 'Hither by thy help I've come.'" Ever wonder about that? I have and one Sunday after singing it I looked it up. Lo and behold it comes from 1 Samuel. First Samuel is mainly about Samuel and Saul. David enters about half-way through. Most have heard of Samuel because of his being called by God as a boy and going to Eli as he thought it was Eli calling him. When Samuel and Eli figure out it is God calling Samuel, Eli tells Samuel to say "your servant hears" the next time it happens. When Samuel does so and what God tells Samuel is very distressing. God tells Samuel that because Eli's sons blasphemed, and Eli did nothing Eli's family will be destroyed.

The Philistines come, waging war with Israel. They capture the ark of the covenant and when Eli hears of it, he falls over, breaking his neck. Eli had been a judge over Israel for 40 years. Into this situation Samuel becomes the judge and is the last judge. There are 15 in Israel's history, one of them a woman named Deborah. A judge is not a King yet is a leader raised up by God. Saul becomes the first King and is anointed by Samuel.

Now with that bit of history and background I'll read the passage for today. It takes place shortly after Eli's death and the Philistines capture the ark. As another aside, the Philistines return the ark pretty quickly because once they have it in their possession, all kinds of calamity befell them. Even though the ark is back with the Hebrews the Hebrews are well ensconced in the culture of the Philistines. Which is where we pick up in our reading. (Read passage.)

Having something that reminds us of God's help is very beneficial today. In our world that seems to be falling apart, greed and fear coming to the fore, we have several Ebenezers. We have worship, we have each other, we have recollections of past help, we have the bible, we have songs, we have Lent and Easter. It is about remembering the past so we can do better in the future. We remember that God is with us, we turn around, repent, and leave one way of doing things for the way God does things. "If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, (and you are), then put away the foreign gods and the Ash'taroth (fertility god) and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him." They do serve God and yet they become afraid again of the Philistines. Again, Samuel speaks for the people and God hears and saves them. And the God continues to be with them as Samuel dies and as Saul becomes king.

What is your Ebenezer? What reminds you in the midst of this coronavirus upheaval in our lives that God is present and has helped us thus far? (Note picture of hiking stick.) This stick has been with me since the mid-80's. It is an aspen stick that I picked up in Colorado as I was hiking one day. It has been with me through the loss of a job in Colorado, through seminary in MN, to calls in ND and here in IL. It has reminded me that God is with me as I journey through life just as the stick helps as I journey along a path.

Emmanuel-God is with us and Ebenezer-God helps us.