

# What Pushes Your Buttons?

Sermon by Pastor Patrick Fish

Pentecost 4

June 16-17, 2018

I Samuel 15:34-16:13

*Grace and Peace to you from God,  
whose surprising love continues to seek after those in our world  
who are overlooked and seen as afterthoughts. Amen.*

## **Move 1: Recap past few weeks of Samuel & Saul**

Today we continue our focus on the Semi-Continuous Readings from Hebrew Scriptures. The last few weeks we've followed the life of Prophet Samuel. We started with him being called by God as a young man. Last week, Samuel gave the people of Israel a warning about the cost and consequences of having a king ruling over them. But the people were persistent and gave in to the pressures of being like everyone else.

So, God being a God of relationship, listened to his people. Didn't force anything upon them. Gave the people room for voice and, ultimately, had Samuel lift up and anoint Saul. A handsome, tall, man from a wealthy family. Saul became Israel's king.

At first, Saul was a strong and faithful king. But during his reign, he became selfish and ego-driven. More worried about the title of ruler than what that title meant. He cared about position over people. His legacy over the lives of those he was called to protect. And that didn't sit well with God.

Saul's tumultuous up-and-down reign as king is still underway at the beginning of today's story. God is grieving and weeping over his people. Over those Saul has forgotten, neglected, and oppressed. God hears them. God sees them. God has compassion on them. And God says, "Enough."

That's where our story for today picks up. God's buttons have been pushed. He's been patient and loving toward Saul. Tried every step of the way to work in and through Saul's leadership to no avail.

But God doesn't strike down Saul. He continues to let Saul lead, but in the background, Meanwhile, God begins preparing for Israel's next king: David.

Before we get deeper into God's anointing Israel's next king, I want to step back and say again, "Happy Father's Day to all the St. Mark's dads out there." We give thanks for all those who serve as father figures and those men who show us what it means to follow Christ.

## **Move 2: Father's Day Shout-out**

For those of us who have lost fathers and husbands, we recognize that this weekend isn't easy for you. That today is filled with gratitude but also deep grief. We remember those men who are now with Christ. We honor them by living in a way that reflects their light in our own lives.

Fathers who are here today, know how blessed we are by you. Know that the way you choose to live you live your life matters. It matters deeply.

My father is one of those people who is a blessing. Who matters and takes his role seriously. Who doesn't just take on the label "father," but lives out what the responsibilities of that title mean every day of his life. Whose life and example have made me a better person, leader, man, husband, and father.

My father always made his kids a priority. We were never an afterthought. We were his *first* thought.

My dad was and still is great at his job. However, it was never a question that family was the most important thing in his life. He was always home to eat dinner with us. Always at our ball games and school events. Always supporting us, even when I know we pushed his buttons.

I still remember a time when we went to the Phillips Park Aquatic Center in Aurora. My dad took me, my brother, and my cousin out for a boys' day. As my dad tells the story, whenever he heard a lifeguard whistle, he knew we were close by. That day, my brother and I counted getting the whistle blown at us 31 times. 31 times was too many.

My father's name was announced over the PA system: "Mr. Fish, please come to the Customer Service Office immediately." There he found three young boys with their heads down.

So many of those memories. Memories of us pushing my dad's buttons. And, yet, my dad always loved us. Always had time to talk with us and try to understand our point of view. Always supported me, despite my spiritual gift at pressing his buttons.

## **Move 3: Me as a Father (and video)**

I have a confession to make. Growing up, I always thought fatherhood would come naturally to me. I love kids. Their energy. Their creativity. Their imagination. Their zest for life. I honestly thought that the whole parenthood thing would be easy.

Two-and-a half years later. Yeah, wow. Ummm, no. Parenthood is so hard. It's 24/7, 365. Morning, noon, and night. No sleep. Constant. Constant. Constant.

And I admit I had a lot of shame for the first year or so of parenthood. Why wasn't I better at this? Why did I struggle so much at being a father? Why couldn't I do this like my dad?

I love my two girls, but *man* do they get on my nerves. Man, do they know how to push my buttons.

And I'll never forget calling my dad crying, saying, "Dad, how did you do this?"

And he calmly said, "Pat, I have 30 years on you. Do you think overnight I was a good father? No, it's something you grow into with practice."

And, wow, did that hit home for me.

I have a video that illustrates this and shows how change in perspective can help us endure even the toughest situations. Situations that make us want to pull our hair out. Those button-pushing moments.

*Description of video shown:*

*["Pushing My Buttons."](#) Produced by Journey Box Media.*

*This video illustrates the importance of learning to interpret and appreciate the buttons. When we shift our perspective, we better reflect our loving God.*

The most important things in life don't happen overnight or have quick easy solutions. Faith is that way. Faith isn't a magic button you push and all of a sudden everything is perfect. We grow into discipleship. We grow into the newness that Christ offers us.

Parenthood is the same way. It's about growth. Learning. Opening ourselves up to newness. All of us have had moments where our buttons are pushed. What if we learned to appreciate the buttons? In doing so, I think we reflect the very nature of our loving, patient God. Our Heavenly Father. Our Eternal Parent.

#### **Move 4: Scripture**

Our God is that loving parent who looks after us. Who isn't absent, but present in all of daily life. Who takes his relationship with us very seriously and doesn't give up, even when we push his buttons.

Who will do a completely new thing if it means more people experience his love, welcome, and embrace.

God reveals this in Scripture.

Saul is in power and not serving the people. Not loving the neighbor. Now we may agree to disagree on some church doctrine, teachings, and traditions. But one thing is clear from the very beginning: Throughout Scripture. Old and New. God makes it abundantly clear. **Love thy neighbor.**

And neighbor isn't just those like us. Neighbor isn't about proximity from our homes. It's more than just our family. It's bigger than those who think and act like we do. Neighbor is meant to be broad. Wide. Inclusive.

Man, women, religious, non-religious, gay, straight, young, old, rich, poor, white, black, brown, citizen, or alien. It doesn't matter how the world wants to differentiate us. In God's eyes, *all matter*. All are created in the image of God. All are loved by God. And all are our neighbors in which we are called to love. Period.

No one is lesser. No one matters less to our God. God calls us to be God's hands, feet, and voice in the world. To be leaders in our time. Who don't separate, but unify. Who don't tear apart, but build up.

Prophets and kings. They were called to serve the people. Love the people. Without exception. Jesus called his followers and the Church to do the same. Serve God's people. Love God's people.

And when we don't. When we get wrapped up in winning debates. In holding our ground. In power. In ego. In human institutions. Who gets left behind? The people. Not numbers. But *people*. Real people. Real families. Real children.

And God doesn't stand for that. Not then. Not now.

In Scripture, Saul has gotten too wrapped up in the title of king rather than using his platform to build up others. And we hear in verse 35 what that does to God.

*"And the Lord was sorry that he made Saul king over Israel." (1 Samuel 15:35, NRSV)*

A better translation: The Lord regretted making Saul king. Strong language for God to have. Regret.

Two times God regrets. Genesis 6:6: God regrets making humanity. He sees how wicked they have become and sends a flood to restart. [1]

And here, 1 Samuel 15:35: God regrets anointing Saul as king.

Rather than send another flood, which God promised he would never do again, God begins transitioning to new leadership. A new king.

Just as the flood started something anew, David will represent a new beginning. For God. And, more importantly, for the people of Israel.

So God sends the prophet Samuel to anoint Israel's next king. And when Samuel arrives, he assumes the next king will be Eliab.

It was customary and expected that the eldest son would receive the anointing. Not so in this story. God breaks expectations. Defies social norms. [2]

Jesse presents every one of his sons. God doesn't choose any of them. We come to learn that Jesse still has one son who is not even present at the line-up. [3]

David's family considered him the least. He's an afterthought. Out tending the sheep. Yet this afterthought becomes the anointed king of Israel.

David may not look the part. "Young shepherd boy" may not check off all the qualifications or the expectations for a king. But, for God, the heart is only the qualifier he's after. And David has that.

### **Move 5: Conclusion**

This is a story of newness. Of new leadership. Of God weeping over his people when leaders fail to love their neighbor. It fills me with hope.

My girls, they press my buttons. No doubt they do. Every day.

But, honestly, what has been keeping me up at night, what presses my buttons even stronger than that, are the thousands of children being ripped away from their families. It's the thousands of people who continue to be told that their being gay isn't okay.

And I'm tired of the focus of the conversation. When talking about homosexuality, often the conversation centers on the number of teens and adults who commit suicide or are assaulted because society wants to suppress people from being their full selves. And people want to contest the accuracy of those numbers. Say it's gotten a lot better.

When talking about unaccompanied minors and families seeking asylum, it breaks my heart to hear about the process of how children are being taken away from their families. Children being sent to juvenile detention centers and military bases while parents are sent to a separate adult detention facility.

The number of families being separated is contested. Some numbers say 1,800. Some say 1,500. Some say 650. Regardless, this is the problem: We focus on arguing on numbers! And what happens? We forget these are people.

If one family is separated, it's too much.

If one teen died or is assaulted because he/she was denied to express who he/she is, that's too many.

These are people. Real people. Real adults. Real teens. Real children. Crying out. Needing to hear God's voice. Needing to experience God's embrace. Needing to encounter the love of God.

Church, my sisters and brothers in Christ, we don't lose hope. We proclaim that God is already involved in this effort. To embrace. To welcome. To love. We are now called as leaders to serve thy neighbor. To love thy neighbor. [4]

Amen.

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Resources:

[1] Wines, Alphonetta. "Commentary on 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13." [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org), June 17, 2018.

[2] Nam, Roger. "Commentary on 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13." [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org). June 17, 2018.

[3] Wines, Alphonetta. "Commentary on 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13." [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org), June 17, 2018.

[4] To read ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and other faith leaders' statement on immigration policy that separates families from children, visit this link: <https://bit.ly/2kXa91w>. To read more information on how the larger ELCA church responds to unaccompanied minors, read about the [ELCA Ammparo](#) (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities).

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