

Foothills Congregational Church  
United church of Christ  
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## **We Are All Haunted Houses**

1 Samuel 28: 7-20

Today's scripture is off the lectionary grid; in fact, it's nowhere to be found in the seasonal cycles of scripture we read in church on Sundays-- perhaps it's too scary, or often too misunderstood. Nevertheless, this spooky passage bears much imaginative material for us to examine our faith journeys with.

Also, we read this passage in the context of the season, where Halloween, Day of the Dead, All Saints Day, and All Souls Day speak to the thinness of our lives and the metaphysical mysteries and past traumas that we sometimes bury deep and tend to ignore.

King Saul is haunted by his inability to hear from God. What truly torments Saul is his unwillingness to let go of power; *he's enslaved to his own ego*. For Saul, the trappings of status, the lure of expectations, and the clinging and grasping hold of self-preservation over the collective well-being of the whole is what possesses and haunts the nearing end of his life. The conjuring up of the prophet Samuel is truth and warning that King Saul fails to accept and heed.

King Saul cannot let go of power, cannot live up to expectations, and cannot, or is unwilling to, hear from God. *It's not that King Saul is purely an evil driven enomaniac*-- he's a deeply flawed and neurotic character-- and yet, one can relate to the heartache of the threat of losing children and with his lost sense of identity and purpose.

In contrast with King Saul, King David (The ancestry line of Jesus) is also a deeply flawed and ego possessed king; but, David has moments of utter brokenness-- something the King Saul does not do.

Noted biblical professor Walter Brueggemann encourages faithful imagination (Prophetic Imagination) when reading scripture. 1 Samuel, part of the narrative history of the kings of ancient Israel, easily lends itself to the

interpretive act of imaginative theology where we not only place ourselves in the story-- *but also place the story in the midst of our faith journeys.*

“It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing future alternatives to the single one the king wants to urge as the only thinkable one”  
(Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 40).

*How are we like King Saul?*

*Do we struggle to hear a word from God?*

*Do we fear the encroaching enemies (Philistines, Amalekites, and David)?*

*Do we anguish in the uncertainty of the future?*

*Are we obsessed with holding onto and maintaining our perceived power and roles in society?*

*Do we struggle with our ego and sense of identity?*

*Are we haunted by the ghosts of our past, present, and future?*

King Saul seeks out the medium (“spiritist” or “witch” in some translations) of Endor. Some Hebrew tradition regards the medium of Endor as the wife of the Prophet of Zephaniah. Whomever she is, King Saul seeks her out in the cloak of nighttime. The medium of Endor is a hopeful source of guidance for a paranoid and nerve racked King Saul-- enemies are closing in on him, and his standing is increasingly on shaking ground; King Saul’s life is feeling thin and frail-- and he can’t find anything solid and worthy to hold on to.

Peter Rollins is a contemporary public philosopher and radical theologian with some influence from Paul Tillich's theology. Rollins uses a creative metaphor, apropos to the current halloween season we are in, to spark our imaginations into reflecting upon what unresolved tensions and struggles that haunt and poses our wellbeing. Rollins says that we are all haunted houses.

We are haunted by a ghostly array of past memories, present chaos, and future uncertainties.

Rollins also offers a mnemonic device for the holy work we are to engage in with the metaphorical (and sometimes metaphysical) ghosts of our past, present, and future. Rollins suggests that our holy work is to transform our poltergeists into holy ghosts; holy ghosts give us meaning and blessings.

Where do we start when transforming the hauntings of our mind and spirit into Holy Ghosts? Pastoral care is important, but when our demons loom largely the help of spiritual direction, psychotherapy, psychiatric, and medical care is also needed.

Journaling, praying, and other spiritual practices also are key tools in the holy work of converting the poltergeists haunting our being into meaningful and blessing holy ghosts.

I once met a man that was immigrating to Ohio from Guatemala. He was a tall individual, but frail and weathered greatly by his arduous journey. I invited him to dinner, and learned his story. He was taking great risks to cross borders and he relied on God for guidance. I was reminded of this ghost from my past ministry this week as news played out about the caravan of migrants seeking refuge.

After we ate together, he showed me his bible-- one of only a few prized possessions he had in his backpack of essential survival aid for his long journey. In the cover of his bible was a picture of his young daughter, (Sanja) that he showed me-- she was the reason he was risking his life to leave Guatemala.

He walked with a limp from falling of a train he was riding for a stretch of his harsh passage. And, he had tattooed teardrops (sometimes associated with gangs and prison); I'm not sure what that part of his story was

about. Sometimes people join gangs out of survival and desperation. But, I do know that when I prayed for him-- he in turn then prayed for me-- and there was power, sincerity, and beauty in his prayer.

Sometimes I think of him and I pray for him and his daughter, Sanja. This is my spiritual practice of transforming a ghost of worry into a holy ghost of hope and love.

Moreover, the mass shooting that impacted the Jewish Tree of Life congregation in Pennsylvania is a torment and haunting in our present days. I'm not sure what the political way forward is when it comes to bigoted and hateful mass shootings and terror; but, I do know that our work in present moments of uncertainty is to meet each horrific and challenging occasion with love and grace. Standing by one another is an act of powerful resolve.

Amen.