



“Everyone’s doing it”
1 Samuel 8
Oct. 14, 2007
Rev. Shelley Lavenne

Years ago, when I was in my 20s, I was invited to a party at friends. It was Friday night. I looked forward to a fun time, talking and dancing with friends. But midway through the evening I went to get something out of my coat and went into the back room where all our coats were stashed. I found my friend’s fiancé and another man, snorting cocaine.

The scene was a shock to me. I’d never seen anyone do that before. But a bit later, I saw one of the men sitting watching other people dance in the living room. So I asked him: Why are you using that stuff? With his red, sniffling nose, he shrugged. “Everyone’s doing it.”

Everyone’s doing it?

Years ago when I worked for The United Church Observer, we were doing a theme on alcohol and addictions. I sat down with a group of teenagers about their attitudes to drinking alcohol and getting drunk. The biggest factor was their parents’ attitude to alcohol. If alcohol was frequently consumed in their home to the point of excessiveness, the teens saw no problem with their also getting drunk – often. There were a handful of teens who rarely consumed alcohol. They came from homes where alcohol was consumed moderately, only at special occasions or not at all.

Everyone’s doing it; in this case it’s their parents. So it must be OK.

Everyone’s doing it. Isn’t that what the people tell Samuel. Our Scripture reading comes a few hundred years after the Israelites have settled in the Promised Land after several years in slavery in Egypt. They have known equality as they didn’t know before. No man is greater than another. There are laws about taking care of widows and the poor. At times, when there is a threat from an outside nation, a leader would arise up, appointed by God, and lead the people to protect themselves. But later that person would go back to their usual position in society such as farming. These people were known as Judges. They would also settle disputes between people.

Samuel was one such Judge. The last of the Judges of this era, actually. There have been a series of threats from the nations around Israel. The Philistines in particular. All of

these nations have Kings. And the people begin to think that if they had a King. They also would be strong. If they had a king, they would be like these other nations.

Everyone's doing it. Everyone has a king. We need one.'

Samuel tries to tell the people that they have it good right now. They are equals. Having a King would change that. But the people insist. Samuel talks to God. God doesn't see that the people need a King but because they're so insistent, God gives them what he asks. Although God tells them what will happen – sometimes they will be at the mercy of a corrupt king. And indeed, later on in the Bible (I & II Kings) we see that.

Read an article where a man talked about decisions that he and his family were making:¹ This is the question that the man, his wife and their children began asking themselves:

"Even though some thing is commonplace, so we really need it in our lives?:

"With that question in mind, all sorts of things were up for grabs: buying a house in the "right" school district, needing two incomes, cell phones, minivans, and even (hold your breath!) signing our kids up for soccer. It was like a little compact fluorescent light bulb turned on to illuminate some of the chains of conformity we had allowed to make our decisions for us. We began to see how deeply we'd bought into culture's code of success being equated with more and more. The results of all this "more" were clutter and confusion and so we decided to simplify our lives. Removing some of the typical suburban clutter was a bit scary, but over the course of a few years, it really has begun to make room for life.

We soon discovered the joy of having fewer bills to pay, fewer trips to make, fewer calendars to juggle, and fewer agendas to manage."

-
- *doing things the 'right' way. I remember years ago struggling to do what was the "right" thing. I soon came to realize that what's 'right' or 'proper' or 'kosher' depending on who you're with or where you are.– wear jeans with this group. Wear business attire here. Talk about politics with this group, talk about sports with these people.*
 - *Some of the women from the congregation went to the sewing convention in Calgary at the end of September. We love sewing. All these vendors with interesting things – and it's a real challenge to say 'what do I really need?' What's helpful? What's simply a gadget that I want because I see others buying it or using it.*
 - *I'm surprised the family even made a decision about soccer for their children. Are we getting our child to play soccer because he really wants to do that? Or is he and are we doing this simply because all the other kids and parents doing it? Is it worthy the amount of time driving and the cost of gas to do this. Because what's important to this family is what kind of imprint on this earth will they leave behind?*

¹ Chad Hall, "Living with Less," Christianity Today International/Leadership Journal, October 8, 2007 (www.ChristianityToday.com)

- *Everyone's doing it. Everyone's busy. We say that a lot. I'm so busy. Don't have time. Work is too busy. Don't have time for God. Certainly don't have time for God's Church.*

What this family found as it cut down on its consumption was the gift of time: The husband wrote: "Lurking amidst the resource of free time, we discovered the pleasure of not just having neighbors, but of knowing our neighbors."

That's an issue for us here in Turner Valley and Black Diamond – one I've come to realize more and more. I'm encouraging you to invite people to this great little church. But in our towns – we're all so busy going back and forth to work and doing our regular activities – a lot of us don't really know our neighbours – except maybe to say a quick, 'hello' as we cut the grass in the summer.

The people of Israel demanded of the Judge Samuel and of God that they be given a King. Everyone else has a king. And so God gave them a king – but really God had offered them something beautiful before – You are all equal in the sight of God. No one stands above you. Israel would have some good Kings. They'd also have a lot of corrupt Kings who didn't follow God's ways.

Chad Hall writes "When I live a gospel life, I desire less stuff for myself, which frees up time and space for heavenly community and this community includes places and people (here), far away and even in the future."

So what does this living with less mean for us – removing clutter, focusing on community and caring for God's creation? Hall writes: "My hunch is that God would be pleased, you would find life more livable and the planet would breath a deep sigh of gratitude."