

Call to Worship

As we begin our worship these words are for thinking: 'We gather as those who worship the One true God who is without weakness, who is beyond criticism, who is honourable and fair, who is just and merciful, who is not the outcome of human choice, or raised to power by partisan nomination. She is God, Creator of heaven and earth, present at the beginning and who will be present at the end. He is God, who favours no one person over another, who cares for all, with a depth of emotion unrivalled. Come let us worship, not human power, celebrity, or wealth, but let us worship the One who deserves all we have to offer.'

Hymn – All people that on earth do dwell

Prayer of Adoration & Praise

We clear our heads, we still our hearts and we come before God in prayer, let us pray.

Strong and steadfast are you, Lord God, ruler over all creation.

Each human created in your image bound to you in love, called to serve.

From the dust you raise us and place us in communities each with gifts and graces meant for sharing.

Forgive us Lord, for we can be stubborn, we can be selfish, greedy and unloving.

Forgive us when fear overwhelms us and drives us into poor decisions.

Forgive us when doubts seep into us and cause us to question your way.

Lord help us to face our fear and doubts to bring them to you and seek your guidance.

Give us courage to follow in your way, give us strength to make the right choices. Help us to lead each other in your way today and always.

For all this we ask in Jesus' name, who taught us when we pray together to say; Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others that sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Reading: 1 Samuel 8: 4 – 20

The People Ask for a King

8 When Samuel grew old, he made his sons judges in Israel. ²The older son was named Joel and the younger one Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. ³But they did not follow their father's example; they were interested only in making money, so they accepted bribes and did not decide cases honestly.

⁴Then all the leaders of Israel met together, went to Samuel in Ramah, ⁵and said to him, "Look, you are getting old and your sons don't follow your example. So then, appoint a king to rule over us, so that we will have a king, as other countries have." ⁶Samuel was displeased with their request for a king; so he prayed to the Lord, ⁷and the Lord said, "Listen to everything the people say to you. You are not the one they have rejected; I am the one they have rejected as their king. ⁸Ever since I brought them out of Egypt, they have turned away from me and worshiped other gods; and now they are doing to you what they have always done to me. ⁹So then, listen to them, but give them strict warnings and explain how their kings will treat them."

¹⁰Samuel told the people who were asking him for a king everything that the Lord had said to him. ¹¹"This is how your king will treat you," Samuel explained. "He will make soldiers of your sons; some of them will serve in his war chariots, others in his cavalry, and others will run before his chariots. ¹²He will make some of them officers in charge of a thousand men, and others in charge of fifty men. Your sons will have to plow his fields, harvest his crops, and make his weapons and the equipment for his chariots. ¹³Your daughters will have to make perfumes for him and work as his cooks and his bakers. ¹⁴He will take your best fields, vineyards, and olive groves, and give them to his

officials. ¹⁵ He will take a tenth of your grain and of your grapes for his court officers and other officials. ¹⁶ He will take your servants and your best cattle and donkeys, and make them work for him. ¹⁷ He will take a tenth of your flocks. And you yourselves will become his slaves. ¹⁸ When that time comes, you will complain bitterly because of your king, whom you yourselves chose, but the Lord will not listen to your complaints.”

¹⁹ The people paid no attention to Samuel, but said, “No! We want a king, ²⁰ so that we will be like other nations, with our own king to rule us and to lead us out to war and to fight our battles.” ²¹ Samuel listened to everything they said and then went and told it to the Lord. ²² The Lord answered, “Do what they want and give them a king.” Then Samuel told all the men of Israel to go back home.

Hymn – Shout to the Lord,

Sermon – ‘Give us a King!’

Have you ever wanted something that someone else has? A fancy car? A luxurious holiday? A newly built house? To name but a few. Well, if you have, do not feel too bad about it because you are not alone. Envy and coveting have been around since the beginning of time. One of the Ten Commandments begins, “You shall not covet...” It is too bad that the Israelites and the elders in our reading today did not remember that commandment.

Another Question. What is a king? A king is a barrier between us and chaos. A king is a strong wall protecting us from whatever we fear the most: marriage problems, a faltering economy, illnesses, crime, or drugs, for example. Anything that threatens to destroy us is chaos. A king promises to bring order out of chaos. Whatever we are afraid of in this world, there is a king to tell us why we do not need to be afraid. For Christians, our king is Jesus. He came to give us the protection we need in the form of a restored relationship with God.

The Israelites wanted a king for three main reasons. Firstly, all the surrounding nations had kings, so the people of Israel wanted a king too. They were influenced by the world and were no longer listening to Samuel. Secondly, the Israelites were concerned about who would lead them after Samuel died. You

see, Samuel's sons were leaders in other parts of the country, but they were not exceptionally good leaders. They made crooked politicians look good! Thirdly, the Israelites wanted a king who would represent power and security and lead them into battle.

So, the choice is between Samuel's sons, or a king and we find in Deuteronomy 17:14-15 that the Israelites have the right to have a king as long as they chose a king from among themselves and not a foreign king. This same passage places restrictions on the king to prevent some of the abuses Samuel outlined. The king was not to have many horses or wives or great amounts of silver and gold, and he was not to exalt himself above the people. Human nature being what it is, these restrictions were largely not observed, and sometimes they are not observed today.

This desire, this wish for a king, to be like their neighbours, led the Israelites into forgetting about God. God saw the Israelites' desire for a king as a rejection of him and everything he did for them. They forgot (as we sometimes do) that God should be first and foremost in our lives.

The people were wise in that they saw an upcoming leadership void. Samuel was getting old, and the people knew that his sons would not be capable of assuming the leadership role. They did not see a succession plan, and they certainly did not see God's plan for succession. They made their decision with their hearts and not with their heads. They did not think things through. They made an emotional decision and not a logical decision.

Are we not the same? How often do we look at things through an emotional filter when we make decisions? Snap decisions are sometimes necessary, but they can often become sources of regret.

Samuel might have taken the Israelites' request as a rejection of his leadership, and perhaps they did. After all, part of their reason for wanting a king had to do with justice and good governance-something that they were not getting from Samuel and his sons. In his response to their request, he apparently does not recognize their concern, either by defending his sons or explaining past

injustices. Or perhaps he is deflecting their legitimate concerns by making it about him!

Samuel knew that the decision to appoint a king was a rejection of God's authority, and the decision would lead to dire consequences for Israel. To make matters worse, Samuel knew that his sons were not fit to succeed him. God warned the Israelites that most of the kings would pervert justice, levy taxes, and help themselves to the best of everything in the land. In fact, Israel had 43 kings over 450 years, and only 8 of them followed God. Most of the human leaders created more problems for the Israelites than they solved.

The same situation exists today. While we do have some good human leaders, there are leaders who start with good intentions but over time they become concerned only for themselves and their supporters and friends.

Today's reading is ultimately about the human ability to make choices for ourselves. God gave us the ability to choose between right and wrong and then suffer the consequences. Sometimes we choose the lesser of two evils, especially during an election, and sometimes we choose between the better of two goods. God limits his power to allow for us to make decisions, but he also shows his power of grace by sometimes allowing good things to happen from our poor decisions. One example was the dynasty of King David, which had a historical significance beyond measure.

We have been called by God to do good works. We must be on guard against anything that would hinder that work. One enemy of good works is pride. We must remember Samuel's words in this passage. God has called us to specific situations, and not anyone else. When we live in the world, we are influenced by the political and cultural environment more than we realise. Consequently, we often lose our ability to distinguish between what comes out of our environment and what comes out of our relationship with God. When we turn from God in sin, our worth is downgraded, but God does not stop loving us.

Samuel's sons abused their power just like some modern-day politicians and CEOs abuse their power. God warned the Israelites that most of the kings in their

future would abuse their power. The people wanted stability and security, but they left God out of this desire. Sometimes we leave God out of our desires and plans also. We must always go to God for guidance, especially when we face life's challenges. Our desire to imitate the world may seem righteous at first, but it will result in destruction. We need to ask God to give us the courage and conviction we need to stand apart from the world.

We need to stop the conversations that begin with, "I'll have what he is having!" or end with, "I'll have what she's having!" and pour out our souls to God in honest prayer, seeking his heart, his plans, and his will. When we do, the Holy Spirit will give us the tools we need to trust that where he leads and what he allows is what is best for us.

Let us pray together.

Creator, Parent, King we bow before you. We come, humble servants, sons and daughters, created in your image. Your divinity, our humanity, a constant mystery. You lead us in love, we follow sometimes. Free will pulls us away, offers us false freedom, lures us into selfishness. Relationship takes work, hard work on all sides. We desire relationship, we long for community, we need your gentle leading to guide us and strengthen us. We offer all that we are, imperfect and frail, and seek your gentle leading as we strive to use our gifts for the sake of your kingdom. Hear our prayer, Lord. Amen.

Hymn – King of Kings

Prayer for Ourselves and Others

We unite our hearts again in prayer, let us pray.

Lord of all, you are the master and commander of all life.

We thank you for the wonder of the universe, for the beauty and fragility of it all. You reign over all of it and ask us to be stewards, looking after all creation.

We are grateful for the people who lead us in science and technology, who discover amazing facts about the universe and ways to help us learn to look after it more wisely.

We give thanks for the people who lead us in medical research, who pioneer new treatments and procedures that give people a better quality of life.

We thank you for the people who write stories and create characters and places that help us explore our nature and place in the universe and beyond into the unknown.

We are grateful for the people who seek to become peacemakers, who create safe spaces for people to enter into dialogue, sacrificing much to help all humanity.

We give thanks for the people who choose to serve their country and try to make the world a better place for everyone.

We thank you for the people who take on leadership roles and seek to serve in whatever way you have called them.

Lord, our world needs more people to seek you out and follow where you lead.

Lord, our world suffers when people choose a different way, a way that does not benefit all life.

Lord, give us courage to lead the way and strength to stand up to fear and doubt. So be it. Amen.

Hymn – At the name of Jesus

Benediction

Lord of all, you who turned power on its head, who showed us that true power was found in vulnerability, guide us, and guard us. May we find our security in you, may we trust, and not be afraid... and, even when we are, may we know

your presence with us, always. So, may the Blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Spirit rest upon you and all whom you love this day and always. Amen.

Closing Song – Send us out