

“Give ‘Em What They Want”
1 Samuel 8:4-20
Second Sunday After Pentecost
June 3, 2018 (B)
Pikes Peak UMC, Pastor Dea Sharp

1 Samuel 8:4-20 (NRSV)

⁴ Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, ⁵ and said to him, “You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.” ⁶ But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to govern us.” Samuel prayed to the LORD, ⁷ and the LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. ⁸ Just as they have done to me,^[a] from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. ⁹ Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.”

¹⁰ So Samuel reported all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹ He said, “These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; ¹² and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. ¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴ He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. ¹⁵ He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. ¹⁶ He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle^[b] and donkeys, and put them to his work. ¹⁷ He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. ¹⁸ And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not answer you in that day.”

Israel’s Request for a King Granted

¹⁹ But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, “No! but we are determined to have a king over us, ²⁰ so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.”

My parents, like many parents, helped me feel like I could be anything I wanted to be when I grew up, if I just put my mind to it.

I don’t recall how long ago, but it was before I knew WELL that Jesus is my King, that I used to open the blinds on my bedroom windows and say, “Good morning World! This is your queen speakin’.” As I’ve been admonished, it must have been a “drama queen” moment!!

I happened to do it again, just a few weeks ago.
Even caught myself and laughed!

I opened the bedroom blinds and said “Good morning World!” But, this time, I stopped and smiled and praised, with a warm spot in my heart, who the King of Creation is....and that one doesn’t become Queen of the World because she says so.

Queen talk aside, I thought it would be kind of enlightening, for the next few weeks, to take a look at one of the most famous **Kings** in the Bible: King David. I’d heard about a book that used David’s life as a sermon series – and **FOR THE LIFE OF ME** – do you think I could find that book?

But, in my searching, I came upon several lists of “lessons from David” and since I don’t venture into messages based on OT passages very often, I thought we could all learn a few lessons.

David is described in the Bible as a man after God’s own heart.

We read about him (and his feats – some glorious and others, not so much) in the books of Samuel and Chronicles. And, of course, many of the Psalms are directly attributed to David.

These days, some writers, scholars and archaeologists doubt that all the amazing things written about David in the Bible could have actually happened exactly as they are written. Some even go so far as to compare David, king of Israel, as a figment of fictional writing – like England’s King Arthur.

But, be that as it may, there is **THIS** historical fact: King David eventually became the standard by which all kings, priests, and leaders of Israel were measured and usually found wanting.

When we consider the details of David’s life as historical facts – that he was found as a shepherd boy, he became a court musician, he took care of a giant, and was an outlaw who became the undisputed leader of the united nation (north **AND** south) of Israel – then we’ll see how he was molded into a great leader.

Even if you don’t believe it all as **FACT**, these stories, **AT LEAST**, form a record of what the people of Israel thought “should” be in a great leader.

The background of today's reading is actually several years before David is even "on the radar" but, it's an important part of the story, because it lays out HOW there came to be a king in Israel at all!

The cycle of good leaders and then bad leaders and then another good one is evident all through the history of Israel. We don't have to wait for the documentation in books that are further into the OT to learn about good kings and bad kings....or priests that leave the people wanting.

So, let's dig in.

Samuel, from the Levite (the priestly) tribe, is getting old and had to appoint his sons as judges.

And they are NOT stellar citizens.

So, the elders of Israel have come to old Samuel to get things changed.

I always have a little dismay when I read, this place in Scripture, about their demands.

I understand that they didn't like the way the youngers were governing.

But, it's the way they thought so little of **God's** organizational plans (and had so little faith in God's system) to make the demand: give us a king.

Personally, THIS is where I get MY first lesson from David's legacy. Am I paying attention to God's plan first?

We all understand that the elders wanted stability!

Up to this point, leadership in Israel has been a combination of Judges and Prophets who rise up to encourage and lead the Israelites when there's a threat. This has been the time of great heroes like Gideon, Deborah, and Samson. But, here's the cycle: after the crisis is averted, the hero-leader goes home and then, chaos rises and the enemies of Israel get stronger again.

Samuel is the last of the prophets of his era, and he's getting old.

And, as I mentioned, his boys don't show much promise.

The Israelites are tired of wondering about the where and when and WHO of their next leader.

So, in the “art of the deal” of their demand, the elders, make a bargain. They’re gonna sacrifice some of their freedom in exchange for security and stability.

We learn the WHY.

Not only is there the “art of a deal” there’s “keeping up with the Jones’!”
The elders want the stability THEY THINK the neighboring nations have.

In our back looking, can you hear mamas asking “If your friend jumped off a cliff would you?”

The elders wanted what the folks next door had, to keep up, and be competitive.

What the scriptures don’t tell us (but we can learn from archaeological studies, that are recorded as early as the 10th Century BC) is that all of those neighbors WERE larger, and more established, and a lot wealthier than the tiny tribes of Israel.

Samuel’s response, his argument (after listening for God’s guidance on the subject) is an economic one: You can’t afford a king.

And he wasn’t just talking about economically.

See, it’s interesting to know, that the Hebrew word for “king” is Melek, which gets it’s root from Molok, who was an ancient Ammonite deity to whom children were sacrificed.

They want a “melek” and Samuel’s trying to get the people to understand that keeping up with the neighboring nations could cause them to sacrifice more than they were aware. WERE THEY READY FOR THOSE SACRIFICES?

EVEN AFTER Samuel warns them of the high cost of a king, the people persist.

A king!

Do you know those moments when a door slams shut because of a decision?

See, here's where the real truth comes out.

The people had become (again, don't think this is the first time) apathetic to God's plans and leadership.

"We want a king over us. Then we'll be like all the other nations, and our king WILL lead us and fight our battles."

I hear whining!

"It's too hard; we want someone to do the heavy lifting and go out and fight our battles for us."

"King, you stick your neck out so we don't have to."

"You be the target and scapegoat!"

"We don't want to do it ourselves."

Be careful what you wish for – queen of the world or otherwise!

Samuel has listened for God's guidance.

Samuel's name, interestingly, means "heard by God" and Samuel is blessed (or maybe cursed) to hear God's eventual response, "Give 'em what they want."

To be clear: God does not give up with resignation. That's not how God operates. God will be there in the dark times, loving his favored people but *they do have a lesson* to learn!

They've been warned!

About taxation and military drafting; about slavery and robbery of their property. But, *that's what they asked for!*

Historically, we know the first king God gives the Israelites is Saul who ultimately proves to be a disappointment, he's erratic on the battlefield, suffers from paranoia and even madness.

Saul is the king of the people's choosing.

The next king though, David, is a king of God's choosing. And, next week we'll get into David's story more, but, let's just say that he does much better than Saul, even with flaws and shortcomings.

Today I want to finish, talking about another king.

Paul wrote to the Philippians that Christ

"though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness....he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death. Therefore God...highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that....every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Give us a King!

But there is a stipulation.

If we're honest, Jesus isn't the king WE ask for; Jesus isn't what we want.

- We want stability and security, but Jesus asks us to take up our cross and follow him.
- In the stormy waters, Jesus asks us to get out of the boat.
- We want to be like everyone else, but Jesus tells us *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*
- We desperately want someone else to fight our battles, but Jesus calls us to fight on behalf of the poor and the helpless: *"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me."* *"If you love me, Peter, (your name here) feed my sheep."*

Give us a King.

Not the king we asked for or the one we wanted, but GIVE US the **king we needed**.

Be careful what you ask for!

And rely on God's plan AND TIMING.

Praise God for our king, Jesus Christ! Amen!