

## **PENTECOST 2B 06062021 The Reverend Lorna Green**

1 Samuel 8.4-11, 16-20; Psalm 138; 2 Corinthians 4.13 – 5.1; Mark 3.20-35

### 1 Samuel 8.4-11, 8.16-20

*Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, 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.' But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, 'Give us a king to govern us.' Samuel prayed to the Lord, 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. Just as they have done to me, 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. 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.' So Samuel reported all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. 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; He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. 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.' But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, 'No! but we are determined to have a king over us, 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.'*

### Mark 3.20-35

*Then Jesus went home, and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.' And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.' And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, 'How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered. 'Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin' - for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit.' Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.' And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'*

What do we want from our leaders? I'm talking about all kinds of leaders: political leaders, company CEOs and managers, school principals, church leaders- all sorts of leaders. What do we expect or even demand from them? Samuel led the people of Israel all his life. He was a judge and a prophet, he prayed for the people and interceded for them when God was angry with them.

But when he was old the people turned around and demanded a king; after all, the countries around them all had kings so why couldn't they have one? Samuel told them that God was their king, they didn't need a human king- but they insisted.

Samuel tried to warn them that a king would conscript people to fight in his armies, would tax them and make people work for him so they would be like slaves: but they answered, 'No! but we are determined to have a king over us, 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.'

Samuel took all this to God, who said 'Listen to the people. They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.' So Samuel listened to the people and made Saul their king. Next week we will hear how that didn't go as well as people hoped.

Saul was the first King of Israel and was followed by many others- some good, some bad. They fought battles to expand their territory and to keep invaders away and their leadership was maintained by exercising military power.

A thousand years or so later, Jesus came along and demonstrated a completely different kind of leadership. He had no wealth or power, he didn't come from an influential family, he wasn't a warrior, so on the surface he didn't look like the sort of leader people would expect.

Yet many people recognised something in him and called him 'Messiah': even Pilate called him King of the Jews, although somewhat ironically.

People flocked to see Jesus once they heard that he could heal people and seemed to have power over the evil spirits that were assumed to cause everything from paralysis to leprosy to epilepsy to mental illness. Mark tells us that on this occasion Jesus was swamped by people who wanted to be near him. First his family came to take him away: it seems they thought he needed to be protected from himself. Then some scribes from Jerusalem decided he must be possessed; why else would this common man think he could preach and teach, and even heal people? That was THEIR job!

Throughout his ministry Jesus was confronted by people who could not understand or would not accept his leadership, because it looked nothing like the leadership they knew. How could he be the Messiah if he wasn't prepared to fight the Romans? How could he be a religious leader when he wasn't part of the official Jerusalem hierarchy? He must be a dangerous maverick and should be stopped.

Remember what Jesus said to his disciples about leadership? In Matthew's Gospel, chapter 20, we read, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; for the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

How does this description of leadership fit with what we expect from leaders today- if it does? And how might it inform us as we elect leaders at the Annual Meeting of Parishioners and seek to discern the way ahead for our parish?

Models of command and control do not work. We might believe we need heroic leadership; we might even be prepared to give up our autonomy in exchange for the false security we hope such a leader can bring, as did the people of Israel.

We must acknowledge that parishes are complex systems that might have complex problems, so every member needs to be invited in to participate and contribute. You will hear more about how we might approach this at the Annual Meeting.

Monica Furlong was a British author, journalist, and activist who worked for the ordination of women in the Church of England. This is part of a speech she gave to ordinands many years ago about what she wanted from clergy:

"I am clear about what I want from the clergy. I want them to be people who can, by their own happiness and contentment, challenge my ideas about status, success and money and so teach me how to live more independently of such things.

I want them to be people who can dare, as I do not dare, and as few of my contemporaries dare, to refuse to work flat out and to refuse to work more strenuously than me.

I want them to be people who dare because they are secure enough in the value of what they are doing to have time to read, to sit and think, and who face the emptiness and possible depression which often attacks people when they do not keep the surface of their mind occupied.

I want them to be people who have faced this kind of loneliness and discovered how fruitful it is, and I want them to be people who have faced the problem of prayer."

These words challenge me as I continue to discover how to be the leader God wants me to be. May they challenge you too, whatever your circumstances, to be prepared to participate- and to be still in God's loving presence.

The Lord be with you.