

Sermon Pentecost 2, June 6, 2021

Shakespeare wrote in his play Richard III, “A horse, a horse my kingdom for a horse...” King Richard knew he and his army were greatly challenged by the Lancastrians - the end of his reign was approaching. Shakespeare portrayed him as a cruel tyrant. Kings and we should add queens too, have been crowned; some ruled well, some reigned for many years, some were cruel, some were defeated in battle. This has been the case throughout history. Having a king used to be the norm in many countries but there are few remaining monarchs. The internet says 44 currently. Of course the best monarch at present is the British Queen Elizabeth (but as I was born in Britain you’d expect me to say that!)

We know that the fledging nation of the Israelite people had no king when Samuel became the high priest and leader. Over the years they had been living in Canaan, the Promised land. God had been the one who had been the equivalent of a king for them. Yes, God was their leader, their provider, the one who had led them through the wilderness, sustained them, saved them from enemies. But they recognized that other nations, all other nations in fact, has kings so why not them? They also recognized that human leadership had been provided by local leaders and currently the high priest’s family. There had been a challenge when the previous high priest, Eli had been alive. He had not disciplined his sons in any way, and they had stolen the gifts brought for sacrifice, raped some of the women bringing gifts and were known as dissolute no-goods. It was a blessing Samuel, Eli’s assistant, was there to follow Eli when he and his sons died in battle. But now Samuel was old, his sons were also undisciplined and not worthy to be successors to Samuel. So, the people demanded a king. But Samuel felt slighted and when he talked to God, we learned that God also felt slighted. However, God like any parent who wants her/his children to follow through on their decisions, even when they seem to be bad ones, let them do as they wished. Have you thought about that – God might be watching you and feeling very sad when you make bad choices. However, God will be with you, even as you deal with the mess you made. I know that for sure.

In our reading God tells Samuel to warn them about the sort of mess they will be in when a king is appointed. They will end up much worse off than they were then because kings would be tyrannical, selfish, and abusive. However, they did not listen.

Their predicament reminded me of a story in Christian Century I read this week of a woman who had late-stage cancer and started to plan for the end of her life. She talked to her family about last things, her plans for her funeral, her possessions. Her family let her do as she wished, even though it was very sad. But then a friend showed her a full-page magazine ad. for a new drug that offered her the one thing she really wanted – more time for living. It offered time to be with her kids, time for her grand kids, time for coffee with friends. The glossy ad dangled the promise that cancer patients who used his drug might prolong their lives. This drug with an unpronounceable name, gave no guarantee it would prevent the spread of cancer, only offered, the one thing she wanted, more time. It was expensive. The small print listed a great many bad side effects. Her family were against her taking it and her oncologist was not supportive at all. But she did anyway. Within 2 months she was dead from the side effects. She had not taken seriously all those listed bad side-effects.

What about you? Can you think of time when you have failed to consider the side effects of your decisions, the times when the outcomes were not good? Obviously as we are now in a yellow covid period you may have decided mask wearing is no longer required. It is a decision you choose for yourself of course. However, in the thrift shop on Thursday – a really busy day as everything was in a

50% off sale – almost everyone who came wore a mask. The three of us working the 4 hours also wore masks – would you have done the same thing? Each decision you make opens up the possibility of challenging side effects, both for you and others. Decisions you make can also have ripple effects; you know that too. Kings and queens should know that too, governments should also know that.

The decisions Jesus made also had side effects. It is strange that the scribes, the Jewish leaders accuse him of being in league with Satan and demons when he has been freeing people who were said to be possessed by demons. People with psychological illnesses seemed to be classified as having demons in that era. The passage from Mark's Gospel we heard this morning is just from chapter 3, but Jesus had already healed many people including many with demons. It may surprise you when I say that when Jesus healed a man said to be demon possessed, the demons recognized Jesus as the holy one of God. Yet the religious leaders either did not really realize who Jesus was, or if they did, they refused to acknowledge it. As well as alerting religious leaders that here was someone who was performing amazing miracles there were the crowds who flocked around him. We understand that they wanted to hear him preach, teach and to heal those sick in body, and /or mind, or spirit. I am sure they also enjoyed hearing him contend with the religious leaders. Jesus always had an answer for their accusations, or he converted their own words challenging them. But Jesus would not let them accuse him of speaking against the Holy Spirit, and he reminded them as he reminds you of the power of the Holy Spirit. He reminded the people who were with him that day that words of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would not be forgiven by God. They had to understand they needed to be careful what they said and the intentions of their hearts. Are you aware of this too? Blasphemy is a serious sin; the commandment against it is listed as one of the 10 Commandments.

His family too seemed to be aware of the challenging situation facing him. In today's Gospel reading, his mother and siblings went to encourage him to withdraw from his ministry. I think they may have been afraid of the growing conflict and the accusations of the religious leaders. But Jesus is a grown man and is no longer subject to his mother's wishes however well-meaning they were. Jesus knew they did not understand him, or his ministry so chose to continue his work. I do not think he meant they were not his family but rather that his ministry was for all, it was for all those around him listening to him. They were all his family, just as everyone who has been Baptized is now a child of God, adopted into God's family.

Welcoming children of God into our family is what we are called to do, just as Jesus did. A Pastor wrote about helping people, in fact helping them by enabling those in jail to be welcomed back into their families. He was asked to visit women in the local jail who were in many cases languishing there as there was no bail money for them. He had been told that a group calling themselves "Southerners on New Ground," a group of LGBTQ members, led by African Americans who had raised a large fund of money which they were going to use to free many black women from the jail in order they could be home with their families for Mother's Day. Isaac, this pastor had visiting privileges, so he went in. He described his time with the first woman to be bailed out. He said how he had to sit on one side of a plexiglass window, and she was brought in, to be on the other. He told her he had been sent by a crowd of people to let he know that they had raised enough money for her bail. She was initially disbelieving, "Do you know how much I need?" she asked. Isaac assured her the group did and the money had been raised. "Don't play with me," she said. He told her that many black women had together raised a huge fund to bail out black women throughout the south. This woman showed Isaac a paper with scripture verses written on it from the psalms, Ephesians, and Philipians. She said she had

been claiming God's promises and now God had broken her chains and was setting her free. The two of them worked out the details of her release. At the close of their time, he saw her get up and look his way, her face radiant. "Thank you, Jesus." She spoke.

Isaac shared that \$100,000 had been raised to pay the bail for 14 women at that jail. He heard later more than half of them had their charges dropped. They had languished in jail for lack of money. All the helpers and those in jail are a part of God's family; all need to be cared for. The side effects and ripple effect of that huge fund helped restore unity to those families. Also, all those who provided the funds knew they had made a huge difference in the lives of all of them.

We heard about kings initially, so, I ask you, "Who is king of your life? Do you claim Jesus to be your king, that he is the ruler of your life. The people of Israel were God's people. You are also one of God's family, a child of God. Like the people of Samuel's time, you can choose an earthly king, a person, a position, some form of earthly power to rule your life. Or you can choose to live as a child of God, trusting God to guide you, today and forever.

Amen.