

This morning I want to explore the leadership of two characters we met in the Old Testament readings last week and this morning. The first is Samuel who was rejected by the people, the other is Saul.

In last week's lesson the people came to Samuel and said, "You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then a king to govern us like other nations." Samuel pleaded with them to resist the temptation to call for a king.

He also begged God to resist their clamour. But God said to him, "Listen to the voice of the people .....they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me."

Samuel's was a charismatic or spiritual leadership. He was highly respected. Had his sons followed in his footsteps the people would have submitted to their leadership.

But when it became apparent that the sons did not share Samuel's commitment to God they requested a king. God reassured Samuel that the people were not rejecting him, they were rejecting God.

The Book of Samuel tells us that Samuel's birth was the result of fervent prayer by his mother. The implication is that instead of engaging in fervent prayer for a replacement leader the people opted for a model of leadership used by other nations.

We fall into a similar trap if we seek leadership that works elsewhere. Leadership that works in industry and elsewhere may not be what is needed for the church. It may not be what God wants for us.

Undoubtedly we can and should apply all the relevant knowledge that is available regarding leadership. But if we are looking for answers without fervent prayer we risk making the same

mistake the people of Israel did in clamouring for a king.

God allowed Samuel to anoint Saul to be king. Soon after Saul met a band of prophets and the spirit of God possessed him causing him to fall into a prophetic frenzy.

Saul proved to be a dynamic leader. When the Ammonites threatened the people of Jabesh the spirit of God came upon Saul and he rallied the people to defeat the Ammonites.

When the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel at Michmash Saul waited for Samuel to offer the burnt offering to the Lord to entreat God's favour before engaging in battle.

Noting that the people were becoming anxious Saul took it upon himself to offer the burnt offering. No sooner had he finished than Samuel arrived. Samuel said, "What have you done?"

"you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God."

Saul's oath when engaged in battle with the Philistines at Ephraim endangered his son's life. He announced that if any of his men ate before the enemy was defeated that they should die.

This condemned Jonathan who was unaware of his father's decree and had eaten some honey. Jonathan's life was ransomed by the troops but Saul's leadership was damaged.

When he failed to fulfil the Lord's command relating to the Amalekites the Lord said to Samuel, "I regret that I made Saul king." God rejected him and commissioned Samuel to appoint another king.

In Samuel and Saul we have different styles of leadership. Samuel was a man of prayer having been raised by Eli the priest.

We see him constantly seeking guidance from the Lord and providing spiritual counsel to the king and the people.

Saul we are told was “a handsome young man” who “stood head and shoulders above everyone else.” He had the capacity to enthuse the people who readily fell in behind him.

His was a “can do” style of leadership that allowed Israel to compare itself with other nations. A style of leadership we encounter in politics, industry and many organizations.

A style of leadership we find in the world and I'm sure you have encountered from spiritual leaders here at St Paul's.

One of the challenging questions locums are asked to consider is; “Was the congregation better able to become involved in ministry with the next incumbent because of the locum ministry and to what extent?”

This is an important question because “One of the locum's primary tasks is to facilitate the next incumbency.”

I think that we could apply a similar question to previous incumbencies and wonder; “How well did the ministry of your previous spiritual leaders equip you to be the people of God in this place? Did ministry continue to grow once the leader left or did all the life of the parish leave with incumbent?”

In the gospel reading we have Jesus likening the Kingdom of God to scattered seed on the ground that grows without the knowledge of the planter. We risk seriously misjudging the ministry of others if we too quickly rush to judgement.

When it comes to the Kingdom of God only God knows where seeds have been planted and which seeds might yield fruit.

In this morning's Old Testament reading we have the account of Samuel grieving over Saul and we are left to ponder what it might have been that so moved Samuel. Could it be that Samuel was saddened that the people had lost confidence in him and the leadership he had to offer?

Could it be that Samuel was sad that he had been unable to instil in his own sons the zeal for the Lord that he undoubtedly possessed and that he had been unable to establish a spiritual dynasty? Did he feel responsibility for the people losing confidence in him and clamouring for the appointment of a king?

Could it be that Samuel was mourning the loss of his own way of life? When God lost confidence in Saul, God called upon Samuel to undertake additional responsibilities. Samuel may well have grown comfortable; thinking that as he aged and lessened in strength that he would be relieved of the burden of leadership.

We have no way on knowing and can only wonder. But many of us would be able to recognize that when it comes to leadership that we can often have a range of thoughts and emotions.

We might moan about the leadership we have, or have had, and wish that it could be, or could have been, improved; but appreciate, if we are honest with ourselves, that it provides or provided us with some benefits.

We can groan that our talents are not being used while at the same time secretly rejoice because that allows us to do other things with our time.

We can also grudgingly admit the strengths of someone we find it difficult to love. I remember my parish priest as a young man being a poor communicator.

But he was a very caring man and over the years I grew to appreciate his giftedness as an enabler of ministry. He was decades ahead of his time.

None of us possess all the gifts that enable a community to flourish. All of us have strengths and deficiencies.

There are some situations where our particular set of skills and giftedness is ideally suited to the situation and there are others where we are ill equipped to cope.

In the gospel story Jesus spoke about the kingdom being like seed that grows imperceptibly. The seeds sown by and through a spiritual leader can go unnoticed.

It may be many years after they have left that we come to appreciate the impact they have had on us as individuals and on the community as whole.

We have noted how Samuel mourned the passing of Saul's kingship and wondered about the focus of his mourning. We have thought about the

spiritual leadership we have received and the spiritual leadership we miss.

The style of leadership we are attracted to and feel comfortable with; tells as much about those looking for leadership as it does about the leader.

In rejecting Samuel the people rejected God. May God be front and centre as you search for a new leader here at St Paul's Ipswich.

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