

Sunday 10th June 2018 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 & 9.30 a.m.		3rd Sunday after Pentecost 10th Sunday of the Year B
1 Sam 8:4-11, 16-20, 11:14-15	Ps 138	2 Corinthians 4:13 – 5:1 Mark 3:20-35
HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD		

“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.’” (1 Sam 8:19)...

“Samuel said to the people, ‘Come, let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingship.’ So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. There they sacrificed offerings of well-being before the Lord, and there Saul and all the Israelites rejoiced greatly.” (1 Sam 11:14-15)

We are doing two things today, both arising out of our Annual Vestry Meeting held earlier this year, and discussions and decisions at PCC: We are having **a focus on ministry**, the life and ministry and witness of the Cathedral. Our life together as the body of Christ, the people of God, slide show of the past year, vestry priorities. And we are having **a time to reflect and to listen** to one another, through the questionnaire.

Samuel

Our Old Testament reading for today, 1 Samuel 8, continues with the story of Samuel. Last Sunday – the call of Samuel, and his response to the voice of God: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” Today we “fast-forward” to when he is now an old man, having judged the people of Israel all his life.

On the whole, these are good years for Samuel and for the people. There are no more invasions. Land that had been lost is restored to

Israel. There is peace between Israel and the Amorites. “Samuel gave solid leadership to Israel his entire life” (1 Sam 7:15-17). The gift of a wise and able leader; but also the importance of the entire community dedicating themselves to God. The leader can’t do it on his or her own. I can’t do it on my own – and nor do I want to!

Israel requests a king

Our reading sees the change from the leadership of the prophets and judges of Israel – a leadership that was informal rather than formal, with authority but without hierarchy, decentralised rather than centralised, randomly raised up and called by God rather than through a process of election by the people – to the formal rule of hereditary monarchs, kings, with a highly centralised rule and concentration of power, structure, and a clear hierarchy – Saul, David and their families, for the generations that followed. Why this change?

At some point during his long life, Samuel decides to make his two sons judges over Israel, but his sons “did not follow in his ways, but turned aside after gain; they took bribes and perverted justice” (1 Sam 8:2). The sons of Samuel sound almost as bad as the sons of Eli.

Deeply dissatisfied with Samuel’s sons, the people now ask for a king to rule over them, like other nations. For Samuel and, we read, for God, this request is a rejection of God’s rule over them. But God nevertheless instructs Samuel to set a king over them. Samuel warns the people of the demands that a royal court will make on them – conscription of young men for the king’s army, resources to sustain the king and his courtiers, even the confiscation of property and cattle. But they are determined to have a king, to lead them, to govern them, to fight their battles. They are no longer prepared to simply trust in God to raise up someone. They want the security of an established leadership structure. In the face of the people’s determination, God permits them to have a king. The kingship is tolerated rather than approved - Samuel finds and anoints Saul (1 Sam 9). And, years later, Samuel anoints David as king (1 Samuel 16).

Why was the kingship a problem? Were the people, in asking for a king, wanting the security of a known system of government and rule, rather than the uncertainty of the judges? Was it wrong for Samuel, or any other leader put in place by God, to listen to the voice of the people? What does this say about democracy and democratic government? Is the development of shared leadership in church and state, a bad thing? Who is to lead our community, and how is such a person to be chosen? Do we wait for God to raise someone up? Do we wait for hearts to be stirred and for the right person – or people – to emerge to take a particular project or ministry forward?

Hearing the voice of God

Is the will of God to be known through the voice of the people? Even through democratic elections? In many ways, we believe that it is. So the many voices and cries of communities in our country are important. The leaders we have chosen, or who are appointed, have the potential to be God's instrument for us all. The immense significance of the appointment of Siya Kolisi as the first black rugby Springbok captain... the fierce debate about new names for our airports, with voices from the coloured communities, the descendants of Khoi and San, demanding that they be recognised and affirmed; growing restlessness and increasing potential for land grabs...the voices of the people are getting louder and louder. What is the voice of God in all this? How do we hear the voice of God?

That is why we as the church have vestries and synods; we discuss matters of mission and ministry; we elect churchwardens and PCC; we have elective assemblies to choose our bishops; and we support a democratic system of government for our nation. And that is partly why we are having the questionnaire today. As much as we have a formal, recognised structure of ordained and lay leadership, we also recognise the importance of listening to what is being said, and in so doing, to make space for the out of the box insights and nudges of the Spirit. Room for spontaneity. Hearing the voice of God. And as the

Cathedral, the mother church for our diocese, one of the major communities of Christian worship in Grahamstown, with many looking to us for a lead and a significant witness...what is the voice of God for us?

Four priorities I identified in my Vestry report earlier this year:

1. Worship – this includes the ministry of preaching and teaching, our various Sunday services, our weekday worship; it embraces a great deal of what we do and who we are. Music and liturgy; lay ministers, altar servers, sidespeople and welcomers, flower team, administrative staff at the office in preparation of leaflets, and indeed the maintenance of the Cathedral fabric – it is one of our priorities. Let’s do our best. We are anxiously awaiting the arrival of Cameron Luke.
2. Young people – we continue with our student outreach and our welcome of students at all our services. Students assist with Sunday School, as altar servers, readers, and as lay ministers. However, I am concerned that while we have a number of teenagers in the Cathedral, we don’t provide an organisational base for them. This is beginning to take shape – thanks to the guidance of Revd Lunga Dongwana and the leadership of our DYG with Tandiwe Gabavana as chair.
3. Inclusivity, particularly when speaking of sexuality and the LGBTIQ++ sector of our community. We discussed this at Vestry last year; we invited the IAM (Inclusive and Affirming Ministries) to the Cathedral in September. Let’s be as welcoming as possible.
4. The environment – the drought in Cape Town has been a wake-up for us all. How are we using our resources? Water? Electricity? Let’s work to have the Cathedral declared and recognised as a “Green Cathedral” in ACSA and in the Anglican Communion. There are criteria for this, and I am

personally eager to see this happen. As the son of a farmer, this is close to my heart!

CONCLUSION

In our life as the Cathedral, in the leadership that I try to give to the Cathedral, in the leadership role of the PCC, we want to hear the voice of God. We believe that God does speak through one another.

So let's take a few minutes for the questionnaire... and let's see where God is leading us, as we seek to hear his voice. Let us be open to hearing the voice of God!

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