

6 June 2021 – Leadership 1

BIBLE READINGS

1 Samuel 8:1–20

When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beer-sheba. Yet his sons did not follow in his ways, but turned aside after gain; they took bribes and perverted justice.

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; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. 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! 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 10:35–45

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to Jesus and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' And he said to them, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.' But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be

baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?' They replied, 'We are able.' Then Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptised, you will be baptised; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.'

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognise as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

MESSAGE

This morning I want to start a new series of messages about **leaders and leadership** – based on lectionary readings from 1 Samuel over the next few weeks ...

One early observation is that **being a leader is no easy task** – whether a leader in the church, or in politics, or on the sporting field, or even in the home ...

It is easy, however, to **criticize** leaders ... for what they do or say, or what they don't do ... how they make decisions, move from ideas to implementation, balance budgets and timelines and outcomes, think about impacts on people, provide – or not – a compelling vision for others to follow ...

- Why do you think it's difficult to be a leader?

Another observation is **who do we use as a model for leadership?** Does Scott Morrison provide a good example? Or our Mum or Dad? Or one of our teachers? Or those in business?

What do we learn from such people? Do we learn that flexibility is good or that if you don't follow the rules there are consequences? Do we learn that when something goes wrong, it's always someone else's fault or do we learn to take responsibility and own up to mistakes? Do we learn to do as leaders say, rather than do as they do?

The Bible offers up plenty of examples of leaders and leadership, from Abraham to Moses, from Deborah to David, from Esther to Jesus and Peter and Paul. What might we learn from each of these examples, none of whom were perfect by the way?

- What sort of leader are you and whose style of leadership have you adopted for your own?

Each person did as they saw fit

At the time of Samuel, Israel was a fairly fluid collection of tribes. It was the era of the Judges when a charismatic leader would arise, save the tribes from one or other of their marauding neighbours and then fade back into obscurity. The final verse in the book of Judges expresses it like this:

In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit (Judges 21:25)

When everything was going smoothly, this tribal way of thinking worked okay, but when any of the surrounding nations got themselves organized, Israel was vulnerable. They needed a way of getting the tribes to work together, to support each other and to help each other. The solution, they figured, was to have a **king** to lead them like all the surrounding nations. In order to survive and to flourish they thought they needed a recognised leader to march at the head of the army and to unite and inspire the tribes into becoming a nation.

This request, of course, is a direct challenge to Samuel in his role as a Judge, a person who acted as a mediator or priest between the people and God and who sorted out disputes, similar to the role done by Moses. So when the people ask for a king, they are effectively saying they don't like Samuel's style of leadership any more. And that's a hard thing for any leader to hear.

So what does Samuel do when the people ask for a change in leadership, to have a king to rule over them? Rather than get angry – or work feverishly to protect his own position – Samuel listens to the request and **takes it to God in prayer**. He senses that this change will have profound consequences for Israel – not all for the better. God nudges him to lay out for the people some of the downsides of a king – the greed, selfishness and corruption that will follow.

From a personal perspective, it's clear that Samuel doesn't want to change to a leadership model based on a king ... he wants to retain the current form of leadership that has served Israel since the time of Moses. But rather than insisting on his own way, he accepts that change is probably inevitable and involves himself in choosing who will become king and sets some limits around how the future king

will live.

Fast forward a thousand years from the time of Samuel to the time of Jesus. Israel's experience with kings as leaders was mixed but mostly poor. Eventually Israel is carted off into exile and the kingship is no more. After the exile, it is **priests** who act as leaders, people like Ezra. As Israel endures occupation and rule by a series of empires, there is a growing desire for God to raise up a new king, a **Messiah** like King David of old, who would once again lead the army and bring Israel to freedom.

People wonder if Jesus might be this Messiah. He was not the first nor the last potential candidate for the role. Jesus talks a lot about the **kingdom**, a way of living where God's rule holds sway ... but he's careful not to call himself Messiah. He has a very different understanding of leadership than the popular hope. He doesn't seek power or riches but rather spends time with the poor and outcasts.

Jesus faces a key moment when two of his disciples seek to become his right hand and left hand lieutenants, positions of power. Jesus turns this on its head and suggests that anyone who wants to lead others needs to **serve** them rather than act as boss. This **servant form of leadership** continues to speak against the usual ways that politicians and business leaders operate, and it remains a challenge for all leaders in the church ... do we lead for personal influence or power – or to serve the needs of others?

What sort of leadership we need

At Croydon, we need more leaders ...

- We need a new chair of the congregation, following the resignation of Russell Davison
- We will also need a new chair of Church Council after our AGM which is scheduled for 11 July as Bruce Turner has indicated he wishes to step back from the role
- We could do with more Elders ...
- ... and a couple more people on the Project Control Group
- ... and for playgroup on Fridays

As I've said earlier, leadership is a tough task – where you can be almost guaranteed

not to please everyone and probably to disappoint people on a regular basis. So it's not for the faint-hearted. But if we take our cue from Jesus and attempt to walk in his footsteps, then leadership offers the opportunity to serve the needs of others ... by seeking to include everyone, by encouraging people to use their gifts, by thinking beyond our current situation to develop and grow a vision for our future ... and to help people change and grow to become more like Christ.

So over the next couple of weeks I encourage you to think whether God might be tapping you on the shoulder to step into one of these roles or some other leadership position.