

7th June, 2015.

Reading: 1 Samuel 8: 4 - 20

Psalm 138

Sermon: Trusting God's Plan Through Thick and Thin

Today's reading from 1 Samuel, in my mind, connected with the verse from Jeremiah which we read last week where God said that His plans for us were for good and not for disaster, plans to give us a future and a hope. It may seem a strange link bearing in mind that disaster was looming in today's reading but maybe that tells you more about how my mind works than anything else.

In our reading for today from 1 Samuel, we see the elders gathered together demanding a King to rule over them. They no longer wanted Samuel's sons who were acting as judges. They didn't want them to rule over them because they were corrupt. They were accepting bribes and perverting the course of justice and the elders wanted better.

Their reasons for wanting a change seem perfectly valid. Why would you want your life to be, by and large, at the mercy of corrupt powers, if there is an alternative? Why would you want to be at the mercy of people who are dishonest and out for personal gain, instead of having as their purpose the good of the people over whom they have power?

Corruption rages in our world and probably on a larger scale than we can even begin to imagine. It's easy to see it

when it is happening in African countries or in disaster areas and aid can't get through without taxes being paid on it to corrupt powers.

In recent days, we have witnessed the arrest of individuals in positions of power within FIFA who are allegedly guilty of corruption. There are demands for change in FIFA because some are fed up with the corruption which has been allegedly happening for years. Corruption rages in our world.

In 1 Samuel, the elders, it seems, want an end to corruption and so are calling for change and they come to Samuel.

The trouble is that Samuel was chosen by God and his sons are next in line. In Samuel's eyes, his sons seem to be part of God's plan and maybe they are, but maybe only so that change comes about.

The elders want change and so Samuel goes to God in prayer. He is upset. He feels rejected and unwanted and yet God tells Him that He is not ultimately the problem.

The problem, according to God, is that the elders have rejected God Himself, and have done so, He says, since they were freed from slavery in Egypt. They have rejected God as King and so now seek a new King.

I can't help wondering who or what has replaced God as King in our world but I suspect it is human and think it may actually be ourselves. Everyone is brought up nowadays to be so self-sufficient and so independent that they have no need of God, or so they think.

Everyone is brought up to choose their own path in life and to do whatever they want, wherever they want, with no thought to what God's plan might be or to where God might fit in. Maybe that is nothing new.

Of course, it may well be that God influences the path we take without us even realising it. Sometimes, it is only when we look back that we see God's hand at work and see how God has led us from one situation to another so that He could use us, whether that be within our Churches or within our families or in our places of work.

It can be quite enlightening. For example, I had no intention of working in a Drug Rehab for a year and yet that is what I ended up doing between leaving University and starting my Probationary period for the ministry. It wasn't my first choice. It wasn't even something I wanted to do but due to circumstances, it was the direction in which my life headed.

When I finished my Probationary period in Rothesay, I had no intention of going back to Glasgow. I considered applying for Ardrishaig but I ended up minister in Drumchapel.

That would never have happened if I hadn't had a year working in the Drug Rehab. I would have felt out of my depth back then if it hadn't been for Rainbow House and the education the clients provided, and believe me, they provided me with an education, one which was probably of more use to me than the one provided by the Divinity Faculty at University.

My path may have been pretty hairy for a time but ultimately God's plan was for good, to give me a future and a hope.

Samuel may have been worried and upset and the elders may have opted for something which created a worse lifestyle than the one they had but despite their choices, God's plan was still ultimately for good, to give them and us a future and a hope.

Going down the path of choosing a King led eventually to King David and following his lineage to Jesus, to the Cross, to the resurrection and to life eternal through Him. God's plan of salvation never faltered. God's plan was ultimately for good and not disaster, to give us a future and a hope. What we see in that is that no matter the choices we make, God's ultimate plan will not be thwarted.

What I find sad in the passage from I Samuel is not that the elders wanted an end to corruption and a change of leadership, it was that they were turning their backs on God as King.

On Tuesday at Presbytery, we celebrated Communion. The hymn which was sung as the Communion hymn was Ye gates, lift up your heads on high and it asks the question: But who is He that is the King, the King of glory? Who is this? And the answer comes: The Lord of hosts, and none but He, the King of glory is.

How many would be able to answer that question if we did a survey? If we asked the general public who the King is, we would probably get the answer 'Elvis'. Even if people knew who was being referred to, how many would

understand the answer, that God, the Lord of hosts, is the King of glory.

How many would understand what it means for God to be King, King of glory, King of our world, King in our hearts? Do we fully grasp what that means or are there times when we opt for a different ruler, just like the elders of so long ago? Are there times when we reject God's rule, even if not consciously?

Are there times when we forget to consider where God fits in in our lives? Are there times when we fail to consider what God's plan is for our lives and get carried away with our own plans? The only comfort is that God's ultimate plan is for good and not for disaster, to give us a future and a hope. He will use us where we go and He will use what happens to us along the way to ultimately bring glory to His Name and to fulfil His purpose.

We don't always know how, especially when disaster seems to strike as it was about to for the elders, but do we need to know? We might want to know but is that not where faith comes in?

There is so much happens in our world and in our own personal lives that it can be hard at times to trust or to see how good is ever going to come out of whatever situation we are in.

Is faith not about trusting God to fulfil his purpose even when we don't know how he will do it, even when we fail to see any reason for what is happening to us or in the lives of those around us? Hard as it is, God's plan of

salvation goes far beyond the limits of our minds and of our understanding.

Faith is about trusting God and, no matter what happens, hanging on to God's promise that His plan for us is ultimately for good and not for disaster, to give us a future and a hope with Him as our King, as our eternal King.