

TOP TEN STORIES & THEMES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Week 5 (Beginning Sunday, October 18, 2009): "WE WANT A KING!"

Readings: 1 Samuel 8:4-9 and John 18:33-38

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT...

+ Q: Can you recall a time or experience when you really wanted something that someone else - maybe a neighbor, friend, relative or co-worker - had?

+ Q: What is it that makes us think the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence? Where do we learn that?

+ Q: Have you ever acquired something that you thought you really wanted, only to find that it was more trouble than it was worth, or that it didn't live up to the expectations?

NOTES ON THE 1 SAMUEL TEXT... (OR, "BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU ASK FOR, BECAUSE YOU JUST MIGHT GET IT!")...

For generations after The Wilderness School, God's Partner People lived in loosely configured families and clans. Whenever crisis arose or decisions had to be made, the people trusted God to raise up leaders to defend them in battle and to provide cooperative leadership and convene decision makers. These leaders - referred to as judges and prophets - came forth from within the ranks of the Israelites as needed and as necessary. Prayerfully and faithfully, God and God's people got along just fine, as they kept to the covenant of the Manna Life they learned in the Wilderness School.

But for whatever reason, when Samuel was getting old and the people didn't think his sons would make good leaders, an argument arose. A majority of God's Partner People looked around at all their neighboring nations who had something that Israel did not have. They all had kings! ... powerful, wealthy, impressive, army-wielding kings! "We want to be like our neighbors," said the majority of the Israelites. "WE WANT A KING!" God, through Samuel, tried to warn them what would happen. They were to trust in God as their only king. A minority of the Partner People agreed with God's prophecy through Samuel. They saw the troubles that would come if they had a king... large armies, heavy taxes, a gap between the privileged (those close to and favored by the king) and the unprivileged, and a gap between the haves and have-nots. The majority got their wish, and God granted their wish, against God's better judgement! (There's that free will thing again!)

The Partner People forgot something very important about their life in Wilderness School ... they forgot that the very system with a powerful king that they were now asking God to give them was the very system they had left behind in Egypt, where they learned how oppressive and divisive such a system could be. This nation of freed slaves, within a few more generations would not only have their king, but they would be making slaves of one another, and creating powerful alliances within and beyond themselves, causing a widening gap between wealthy and poor, between land-owners and workers with no land, and neglecting the lessons learned about Manna Life in Wilderness School. Hoarding and Poverty would burden them once again.

+ Q: Have you ever seen or been part of the minority voice that called people or groups to accountability? Often, only in hindsight do we see the wisdom of prophets in our midst.

+ Q: Where do we see evidence of the minority prophetic voice being heeded to the benefit of society? (The Civil Rights movement seems to be one example.) Where do we see the minority prophetic voice being ignored for a long time, to the detriment of society? (Global Warming and the deterioration of the environment through pollution seem to be an example of this.)

+ Q: What are some other examples in our lives of these two circumstances?

LIFE IN SYSTEMS... CAN'T LIVE WITH 'EM, CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT 'EM...

We all take part in systems! Life is systemic, for sure. We participate in groups, families, organizations, communities, governments, neighborhoods, companies, institutions, etc. Some we belong to by choice, while others are a given; some are less formal while others are more formalized; some highly structured, others loosely so; our systems are large, small, and everything in between. The systems in our society can produce incredible good; they are also capable of causing incredible harm. What it all boils down to for God and God's Partner People (that's us!) is we are here to remind everyone about the guidelines of the Manna Life. Do our systems promote equality and fairness? Do our systems serve the greater good of all? Are we engaged with our systems in a way that improves life for the greatest possible number of people? If some are benefitting, is it because others are suffering or being oppressed? Does the "good life" for some create gaps that make life harder for the rest?

Think about all the systems you are part of. What are some ways you have worked to improve them? What are some ways they need improving? How might you be a vessel of God's fairness and equality in one of the systems you are currently living with, in and through? Is God speaking to you about fairness or equality in someone's life you encounter or can impact?

COMING NEXT SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25...

Week 6: "The Need For Reform" (Isaiah 58:1-12)

It happens to be Reformation Sunday as well, so wear something RED if you wish!

Blessings on your journey as we continue the Faith Trek together,

Pastor Charlie and Pastor Jay