

“King or Kin?”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

June 6, 2021 – Second Sunday after Pentecost

1 Samuel 8:4-20; 11:14-15; Mark 3:20-35

Kings and kin are the subjects of today’s quite lengthy readings from 1 Samuel and the gospel of Mark. In 1 Samuel, we read of the kindred children of Israel crying out to the prophet Samuel to be led by a warrior king as the nations around them were. Up to this time in their history, many generations after the days of the Exodus and the Israelite’s entrance into the land of promise, they had no king, but were led by God and God’s chosen prophets and judges. But the people wanted to be led by someone else. Perhaps they had a bit of neighbor envy and wanted to keep up with the Joneses as they saw the warring nations around them surviving and expanding their turf by uniting under kings and making war, and so the Israelites longed to build their own empire and be led by their own heroic warrior.

God makes clear to Samuel what will happen when they are led by a king rather than God: The king, as kings of the world do, will take, take, take. He will take their sons and daughters and make them go to war and go to work for him. He will take the parts of the land that he wanted and the produce from the parts he let others keep and work. He will take the people’s flocks and the people themselves and put them into his own service. But the people wanted to be taken by a warrior king anyway, and so were at last given their tyrant in King Saul.

Our gospel reading from Mark also tells of both kings and kin. We read that Jesus own kin didn’t quite understand what he was saying and doing in his ministry, in which he emphasized the coming of God’s realm on earth, where God would once again lead the people – all of the people – establishing a realm where all will enjoy peace and prosperity. Jesus taught that this good realm, where the One who led it gave to people rather than taking from them, was at hand. This reality was demonstrated by Jesus as the sick were healed, the hungry were fed, and the lowly were lifted. But to Jesus’ family as they appear in this gospel, his calling was not to be a teacher or healer or miracle-worker, but just a craftsman, and he should return to his senses and return to the workshop and go back to making

and fixing things of wood. His mission, however, was not to work with wood any longer, but with human hearts. But he and his mission were misunderstood by his own family, just as they were misunderstood by his own disciples, the religious leaders, and everyone else around him.

We are told in today's reading that the scribes, professional religious types, considered him to be demonic, calling him Beelzebul, which is another name for Baalzebub, meaning "Lord of the Flies," who is the king of demons, also known as Satan, the personification of demonic evil. To the world, Jesus' healing work and way of radical, selfless love was understood as being either demonic or insane, but it was neither. Jesus' way of loving and lifting up the lowly was truly of God, whereas the way of the world -- the selfish, empire-building way of kings -- was that which was truly senseless and evil.

Jesus invites all to join him in living and loving in his otherworldly way and so become part of his holy family. We gather this morning as the kin of Christ, and we welcome others to join our little gathering of Christ-followers, just as we just welcomed another little brother into our fellowship in the baptism of James, offering him our love, support, and care. Our extravagant welcome is extended to little ones like James and to all those who are told by our world that they are little in value. We welcome and embrace as family those who have been told they have no place in God's realm because of who they are or whom they love. The only ones that are unwelcome and excluded here are the demons of disrespect.

So, in this Pride Month, let us celebrate our own beautiful fellowship of LGBTQ and straight. As we take steps to return to using our facility to host groups that are told by the world that they do not matter because they are too broken, too poor, too lonely, too old, or too young, let us be proud of our welcoming, life-giving family tradition. Let us struggle together in deed and word against the continuation of our society's kingly ways, in which the empowered maintain and growing their privilege by taking from the less powerful. No matter how the world around us considers us to be insane or evil because of our selfless commitment to love and embrace the other, let us ever continue forward, undaunted on this good, blessed path of our Kin Jesus. Amen.