

Earlsdon 17th January 2021

Singing the Faith 7 God who made the stars of heavens

Read - 1 Samuel 3:1-20

A familiar reading to many – especially when focusing on the smaller picture of Samuels's calling, but, like all bible stories, it's also part of a bigger story. Today I'd like us to look at the bigger story. The story of God's relationship with a nation and His world.

Samuel is often considered to be the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. He is around when the nation of Israel, initially a theocracy (where priest have the power), becomes a kingdom, with a more conventional ruler. In both these times God is seeking a relationship with the nation of Israel. A quick look at the beginning of 1 Samuel, and then forward into the books of Kings, the time of David and Solomon, we can see the difficulties. The judges and prophets tried to direct the nation in a Godly way – to sustain the relationship, but they fail. Why?



In the Old Testament we see God trying to mould a nation; when things go wrong the judges or prophets act or speak out. They warn of dire consequences, or speaking words of hope, but often they address issues that are of concern to God as he tries to build His nation. When God's rules are ignored, when widows and orphans are not cared for, when the poor go hungry or the rich take their position for granted and ignore their responsibilities to those less fortunate, the prophets speak out. And it's not just the Old Testament – take a look at the

Magnificat in the first chapter of Luke or consider the last verse of our opening hymn.

We often avoid politics – either, by insisting our faith only has a personal dimension, or, over concerns about how people use religion for political ends. Both valid points but not the whole story – they are the smaller picture.

We look at reading like John 1: 43-51 and seeing the care that Jesus has for an individual – can conclude that our relationship with Jesus is just personal. Nathaniel is called to follow but where to? It is not just personal, there is a reason for being called – Jesus also talks about, and shows, His kingdom on earth not just in heaven. Our faith is not just personal – it's part of a bigger picture.

Our other lectionary reading shows Paul, once again dealing with the excesses of the church in Corinth. (1 Corinthians 6:12-20) The city, a port, was a centre of commerce, culture and religion – clashing cultures, full of distractions, in the Greek world a by word for sexual immorality. But when Paul lectures the Corinthians it is not so he can exercise control or power rather to remind them of who they are now they belong to God and are part of the body of Christ (see chapter 12). We should be wary of those who would use our faith - history is full of examples; corrupt popes, power-loving bishops, right-wing fascists and left-wing appeasers. Having a strong, individual relationship with Jesus, knowing our bible and being informed should help us recognise these situations. Where do we see 'rules' are regulations cruelly and crudely use to control people or create 'outsiders'? When do we become judgemental rather than gracious?

The bible is a political book – we may never have seen a 'Christian' country but Jesus worked to build the Kingdom of God here on earth (Singing the Faith 255). He was killed by those who could see the political dimension of His message. Jesus – like the prophets before Him



– give us some ideas about how we recognise His kingdom in our nation. How a nation is run is politics! What do you think a 'Christian' country looks like? Samuel lived at a time of change, he was a respected voice and influential. The nation of Israel under David and Samuel is seen as a 'golden' time. Sadly, it did not last.



Our faith, our God – is about both the small picture (individual lives) and the big picture (our nation and our world). Aren't we concerned about all people? The two are connected by how individuals act and speak, in families, in social groups, by the people we support feeding into the bigger picture. Our country is at a time of change – the pandemic has caused 'normal' to pause – maybe its time to look back at our prophetic roots, ask some questions about the bigger picture, and consider what influence we can have to make it more like His kingdom.

"Thy kingdom come"
Amen

Singing the Faith 544 Be Thou my vision

You might like to listen to it on YouTube here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEP8SkGOnbE>

Intercessions

You could look again at Singing the Faith 255 to inspire prayers for God's Kingdom

This is the prayer used before each parliamentary session. We can pray this for those who lead us too.

"Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and her government, to Members of Parliament and all in positions of responsibility, the guidance of your Spirit. May they never lead the nation wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but laying aside all private interests and prejudices keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all mankind; so may your kingdom come and your name be hallowed. Amen."

From <https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/business/prayers/>

We pray for –

Those working with COVID-19 Patients, distributing the vaccine,
Those who still have to go out and work - teachers, police.
Those who are ill – whether or not it's COVID-19 related
Those who mourn
Those who are isolated
For those needs that are still hidden behind closed doors.

Our ministers and carers – making decisions and distributing aid
Charities – Trussell Trust, Carriers of Hope, ...

Ourselves – give us patience, guard us against anxiety and fear

Singing the Faith 660 Called by Christ to be Disciples

You might like to listen to it on YouTube here (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXQSh2iTj2I>)