

“Just Like Everyone Else?”
St. Paul’s United Church of Christ
June 6, 2021

Friends in Christ...

Forms of government have changed over the years. While most are some type of monarchy or powerful leader, there are representative forms, and there have been theocracies, a current example is Iran. Our history in America is interesting of how we got there. Briefly...

The dates of the Revolutionary War that brought independence to the colonies are a little hard to determine. There were a lot of things that led up to the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775.

The War did end at the Battle of Yorktown in 1781 when General Cornwallis surrendered to General George Washington. Then there was a period of time as to how do we govern now that we are free. In 1787 the Constitution was signed. George Washington was elected president two years later. During this time of transition, there was much debate about what next. Some went to George Washington asking him to become king. He looked at the abuses of power that King George III had committed, and said that was not what the colonies needed or wanted. Instead, it led to a representative form of government which continues today. His words of warning about a monarchy were very similar to what we find in the second part of our Old Testament lesson from 1 Samuel Chapter 8: We will skip verses 4 through 9 and begin with verse 10:

¹⁰ Then Samuel explained everything the LORD had said to the people who were asking for a king. ¹¹ “This is how the king will rule over you,” Samuel said:

“He will take your sons, and will use them for his chariots and his cavalry and as runners for his chariot. ¹² He will use them as his commanders of troops of one thousand and troops of fifty, or to do his plowing and his harvesting, or to make his weapons or parts for his chariots. ¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, or bakers. ¹⁴ He will take your best fields, vineyards, and olive groves and give them to his servants. ¹⁵ He will give one-tenth of your grain and your vineyards to his officials and servants. ¹⁶ He will take your male and female servants, along with the best of your cattle and donkeys, and make them do his work. ¹⁷ He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and then you yourselves will become his slaves! ¹⁸ When that day comes, you will cry out because of the king you chose for yourselves, but on that day the LORD will not answer you.”

¹⁹ But the people refused to listen to Samuel and said, “No! There must be a king over us ²⁰ so we can be like all the other nations. Our king will judge us and lead us and fight our battles.”

The people of Israel had lived as the 12 tribes for about the previous 200 years under a system of judges. There was no central government. When a critical situation arose, God called someone to rise up and lead the people to victory over their enemies. Israel was supposed to be unique because God would be its leader, unlike any of its neighbors.

With Samuel, the series of judges ended. Samuel was also last in a long line of important prophets. He had appointed his two sons to follow him, but they were corrupt and the people rejected them. Granted, the Israelites were wise enough to realize that Samuel’s sons did not qualify, they knew that something had to change. The people looked around at their neighbors and wanted to be like them. They wanted a king.

But, in this new stage in Israel’s communal life, the movement from theocracy to monarchy begins with a stern warning from God. God made it plain that leadership by anyone other than God was a bad idea.

Kingship, no matter how much Israel wanted it, no matter how attractive it might have seemed was a bad idea. They were warned that installing a monarchy would be asking for trouble. The validity of God’s warning would be played out again and again as Israel unwittingly moved toward embracing a monarchy and left the theocracy behind. It was only a matter of time before Israel’s enemies overran the country and took its citizens into exile. The Mideast continues to be in turmoil yet today.

moved toward embracing a monarchy and left the theocracy behind. It was only a matter of time before Israel's enemies overran the country and took its citizens into exile. The Mideast continues to be in turmoil yet today.

And the warnings came true. And the warnings still apply to today. Just look at the countries that are ruled by a strong leader like Russia and North Korea.

It was a cry to be just like everyone else.

Jesus was not like everyone else. He didn't fit in any mold. Mark was written with immediacy and we are only at Chapter three. He has already bested Satan, cast out a couple of demons, cooled a fever, healed a leper, given locomotion to a person paralyzed, and reconstituted a withered hand. No one could do what Jesus had already done. Where did he get that power?

He had nothing that others could exploit. He had no weaknesses, no fatal flaws. From Mark, Chapter 3, here is this confusion about who he is:

²⁰ Jesus entered a house. A crowd gathered again so that it was impossible for him and his followers even to eat. ²¹ When his family heard what was happening, they came to take control of him. They were saying, "He's out of his mind!"

²² The legal experts came down from Jerusalem. Over and over they charged, "He is possessed by Beelzebul. He throws out demons with the authority of the ruler of demons."

²³ When Jesus called them together he spoke to them in a parable: "How can Satan throw Satan out? ²⁴ A kingdom involved in civil war will collapse. ²⁵ And a house torn apart by divisions will collapse. ²⁶ If Satan rebels against himself and is divided, then he cannot endure. He is done for. ²⁷ No one gets into the house of a strong person and steals anything without first tying up the strong person. Only then can the house be burglarized. ²⁸ I assure you that human beings will be forgiven for everything, for all sins and insults of every kind. ²⁹ But whoever insults the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. That person is guilty of a sin with consequences that last forever." ³⁰ He said this because the legal experts were saying, "He is possessed by an evil spirit."

³¹ His mother and brothers arrived. They stood outside and sent word to him, calling for him. ³² A crowd was seated around him, and those sent to him said, "Look, your mother, brothers, and sisters are outside looking for you."

³³ He replied, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" ³⁴ Looking around at those seated around him in a circle, he said, "Look, here are my mother and my brothers. ³⁵ Whoever does God's will is my brother, sister, and mother."

May God bless our hearing of his holy word? Amen.

If you can't figure someone out, then they must either be crazy or possessed. Right??? Think about how often when someone does a bad action, there are questions about their mental stability. Even though Jesus had lived some 30 years with his family, and yet they still did not know who he really was. The family was with the crowd questioning him. Was he crazy or possessed? Scribes came from Jerusalem to observe and question Jesus. Now, who were the Scribes?

Scribes were a group of Jewish leaders who flourished from the time of the Exile until the destruction of the Jewish state by Titus (70 A.D.). Originally their name (Heb. *sōperêm*, writers) was used merely of clerks whose function was to copy royal and sacred manuscripts. Later, the title signified the official post of one who was learned in the Law of Moses

Matt Skinner wrote: "Those scribes were theological heavyweights. They represented the authority and theological wisdom of the temple establishment — the same establishment whose leaders ensured that Pilate will crush Jesus at the end of Mark. The scribes' credentials were impeccable. Their pronouncement that Jesus is a satanic agent and not a divine one recognized that a power was at work in him was evil. They offer the most damning assessment they can."

Their claim that Jesus's power came from the devil was strongly refuted by Jesus as he used a parable to make his point. He has control over Satan, not the other way around. Still, they just couldn't imagine that all the power of Jesus came from God. But we know the truth.

The community saw Jesus in action, yet many could not believe who he was, and his family is with the community. We see the power of Jesus in our lives.

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with the community. We see the power of Jesus in our lives.

In a seemingly shocking statement, Jesus offers a different definition of “family.” Noel Niemann wrote: “that Jesus offers a definition of "family" that is not about DNA, but about shared values, beliefs, or principles we have in life. It is about having a mission that is in line with God's will for the world. Of course, doing the will of God takes many forms. We are not called into uniformity, but into unity by doing God's will. Yes, I can be closer to some of my faith family, but still honor those who do a different walk according to their call. We acknowledge the unique gifts and strengths of our family and celebrate all parts of the body. In Christ we can welcome home and welcome to worship all our brothers and sisters and together celebrate God's mission of love and mercy.”

We are part of a church family, actually several of them. First is the local church, here it is at St. Paul’s. Next is the district that our local church is. Then comes our denominations. And then all of us are a part of that universal group of Christians. In the Apostles’ Creed we say that we believe in the “holy catholic church”, which is another way of saying the church universal.

When Israel wanted a king, they wanted to be just like everyone else. When we follow the true King, Jesus, we are just like all other believers in that we are saved by grace. Jesus died on the cross for each and every one of us. We may worship him in different ways, but we are brothers and sisters in Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.