

24th November 2024 Worship 4 Everyone
Choosing a King

1 Samuel 16: 1-12
John 19:13-22

Part 1

This morning we're thinking about choosing.

Easy? or difficult?

Who finds it easy?

Difficult?

Not sure....

I find it really hard

Getting up

What to wear

What to have for breakfast

Grown ups so boring that we've stopped choosing and just do the same thing every time

Kids game – would you rather:

Would you rather have tiny feet and huge hands or huge feet and tiny hands?

Would you rather be able to jump as far as a kangaroo or hold your breath as long as a whale?

Would you rather blow out 50 butterflies every time you sneeze, or cough out a mouse every time you cough?

Would you rather kiss a frog or lick a slug?

No right or wrong answers – just a silly game

But some choices are very important.

How do we make them?

(I wonder.... Or take answers)

Important – make up our own mind – not just do what everyone else does.

Based on what is important to us.

Story –

The people probably wanted a king who would look the part – be tall, and strong and handsome.

They probably wanted someone who would be good at leading the army into battle – someone powerful and muscley and who would shout a lot.

They maybe wanted to oldest son because that was just the way things worked in those days.

But God didn't choose the boys who were the oldest or biggest, or strongest, or most handsome.

He said – "I don't look at the outside – I look at the heart."

And when he looked at David he saw that David was good and honest and that David loved him.

David loved God, and listened to him, and followed him.

And that was the most important thing.

And actually still is....

Part 2

I wonder how many of us remember that story of David from our childhoods? Maybe from Sunday School? Prob alongside David and Goliath. Maybe as got older, David and Bathsheba.

Bible full of great stories.

Problem is – can feel like they are all separate stories, rather than chapters in the much bigger, overarching story of God, and the relationship between God and all that he has made. Especially human beings.

If you've been to one of the Bible mornings which we run occasionally, you will have heard about some of the big themes that run through the Bible from beginning to end

The story of God's big rescue plan - salvation

The story of God's presence with us

The story of God's promises or 'covenants'

And tied up with that last one, the story of God being our King.

It's probably fair to say that our understanding of the role of a king (or queen) has evolved since biblical times, from absolute ruler, to ceremonial head of state. Perhaps, in thinking of God as our king it's helpful to think of the Biblical concept of King as shorthand for "the rightful leader of a people or nation". The one who provides security, justice and direction for those for whom they have responsibility. The one who shapes the identity of their people, and enables them to flourish.

And in return, the people offer their allegiance.

It's a kind of mutual declaration that "I am for you" – the king/queen *for* their people, and the people *for* their monarch.

In the beginning – as it says in Genesis, God was King. And then amazingly, in love, he chose not only to share that kingship with human beings, but gave them, too, the gift of choice.

And we know how that turned out. When Adam and Eve chose not to go God's way, their intimate relationship with God was shattered, and the human propensity to mess things up took hold. The story continued over many centuries. God made a promise to Abram and his family, and from them raised up men (and the occasional woman) to lead his people under His direction. Some leaders were good. Some - not so much.

And so the people became restive, they lost sight of God and demanded a king of their own – "like the other nations have."

Samuel warned them that a human king would not be a good plan – too much power to abuse – but they would not listen, and God acceded to their choice. The story of David we just heard was about the anointing of the second king of Israel – the first one, Saul, was already proving to be a bit of a disaster.

David – the shepherd king, the one who knew and loved God – was not perfect either, but he acknowledged and turned away from his faults and failures, and became the great king, ruling under God. And God promised that one day, a descendant of David would come who would be the eternal King. The great saviour of his people. The Messiah.

Centuries passed. The kings who followed David were a variable bunch, and the people of God had a rocky history. Good kings, bad kings, losing sight of God, defeat, exile, restoration, invasion, Romans. Maybe unsurprisingly they were looking for a great military leader as their Messiah. Their religious leaders were divided into factions – some advocated working within the political system, others rebelling against it. Still others insisted that strict religious observance was the only way to hasten the end of their oppression.

At what point does a desire for the power to do the right thing become a desire for power in its own right? I wonder. I suspect it creeps in earlier than we might think – in our own lives as well as in the lives of leaders and those in authority.

Whatever the answer to that is, when these religious leaders looked into the face of God, it didn't look the way they expected it to, and so they completely missed him. They missed the King they were waiting for. In fact, Jesus didn't even get the silver medal. They chose Barabbas, and they chose the Roman emperor – and sent Jesus to the Cross.

With a sign above his head saying "This is the King of the Jews."

Which Pilate refused to change. I wonder, had Pilate made his choice of King, but just lacked the courage to see it through? Or did his love of power overwhelm his desire for truth?

Traditionally, kings were lifted above their subjects on magnificent thrones, their splendour and power on display for all to see. The throne on which Jesus was lifted up was the cross, a symbol of failure, disgrace and mockery. But also the place of his coronation - as he had foretold.

Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. John 12:32-34

The Cross – where the ‘love of power’ was overwhelmed by the power of his self-giving love.

And so the story rolls on. The resurrection. The ascension, where Jesus returns to the Father, reigning in glory. And from where, we will be reminded next week, we believe that he will one day return to set all things right.

When we were thinking about what kingship might mean, we spoke of it being a kind of mutual declaration that “I am for you” – the king/queen for their people, and the people for their monarch.

The Cross shows in stark horror the cost of God in Jesus saying to humanity “I am for you”

I guess the question now is, am I for God? Which kingdom am I choosing?

Who or what – is my king?

Truth is, we all make kings out of something. Football. Possessions. Status, Power. Our own intellect. Family even...

We all look to things to provide us with security, justice and direction, shape our self-identity, and to enable us to flourish.

So, in the biblical narrative, the Israelites, the religious leaders and crowd made their choice of king.

And following the resurrection at least some of Jesus’ followers made a choice to acknowledge *him* as their king – and despite the hardships and persecutions that often followed, they found that the love and acceptance and forgiveness of God changed their lives, making them deeper, and richer and more fulfilling than they ever could have imagined. They found the truth in Jesus words “I have come that they might have life, and have it in abundance.”

So, what about us?

Is Jesus our King? My King? The centre of *my* life?

Maybe you see the question as being too simplistic? There are lots of things to consider about God and Jesus and whether he is who he says he is, before we even get to that question.

It's more than ok to ask questions. The gospels tell us that one of Jesus closest friends initially wasn't sure; and that the group who witnessed Jesus ascending into heaven included those who had doubts.

It's the biggest choice we'll ever make, so we need to consider it carefully.

But don't we all owe it to ourselves to think about it?

On the cross, God in Jesus said "I am for you".

I wonder - can we say in response: "I am for you, Jesus. You are my King."