

# Sermon

## “A Cow, A Coup, and a Comely King”

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, June 13, 2021

The Third Sunday After Pentecost

### Prayers for Illumination:

**Lord God, we know too-well what our world is like . . .**

† **So often *not* radiant with the love of Christ,**

† **Prone to violence of a dozen-different kinds,**

† **Where the haves have more than they need and the have-nots have not nearly enough,**

† **Where we are coming to a growing awareness of the ways in which our common social & economic arrangements are unjust and inequitable,**

**We yearn for something better — for a way out of our cycles of violence and exploitation and fear and anger. So we gather today as your disciples have gathered for millennia and we wait to hear you speak of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. You say, “The kingdom of heaven is like...”**

† **Like the mystery of life itself, where we plant a seed and wonder that a sheaf of grain grows from it in ways that are a marvel...**

† Like the tiniest of beginnings which flourish and become a blessing to others...

† Like the anointing of the unqualified to be great carriers of your blessing-filled intentions...

**So explain to us once again about your kingdom with its odd & inconvenient demands — and its many blessings.**

**For our part, we are all-ears — we want to be able to hear what you are saying. So may your Spirit inspire, may the light of light illumine as we encounter your Word this day.**

**In the name of the Lord who “looks upon the heart.”  
Amen.**

*Mark 4:26 He also said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, 27 and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. 28 The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”*

*Mark 4:30 He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”*

*Mark 4:33 With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; 34 he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.*

*1Sam. 15:34 Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul. 35 Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel.*

*1Sam. 16:1 The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." 2 Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' 3 Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." 4 Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" 5 He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.*

*1Sam. 16:6 When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD'S anointed is now before the LORD." 7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." 8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." 9 Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." 10 Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." 11 Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." 12 He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in*

*the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.*

- I. Last week pastor Alan did a fine job of reminding us about the resistance both God and Samuel had to Israel having a king.**
- A. Even so, God relents and allows the king to be chosen**
- 1. — though only after they are warned of all the ways kingship will lead to**
    - † exploitation and**
    - † the perils of autocratic impulses.**
  - 2. Our newspapers have been filled in recent days with new revelations of the dangers to democracy of autocratic leaders.**
  - 3. Stunning how often the text seems to speak to new moments many years after it was written - isn't it?**
- B. Give that God has *just* relented and allowed a king...**
- 1. Today's text from Samuel is a curious story**
    - † Regime Change! — Coup!**
    - † And YAHWEH is the instigator of this insurrection!**
- C. A little background will set the stage for this...**
- II. In chapter 15 Saul was anointed as King and is immediately told to slaughter the Amalekites.**
- A. Saul follows his instructions mostly . . . but the reader is sympathetic with Saul because, after all, the Amalekites seem to have done little except be in the way — hardly grounds for genocide.**

**B. Chapter 15 *claims* that the Amalekites are being punished because of their opposition to Israel during the flight from Egypt, BUT — if you look for them in that story all you find is the following in Num. 14:43 when Moses, once again fed up with his stiff-necked followers says, “For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will confront you there, and you shall fall by the sword; because you have turned back from following the LORD, the LORD will not be with you.”**

**1. So it is clear that the Amalekites *are God’s agents, doing to Israel what God wants to punish Israel for its own failures.***

**C. Even so, Saul dutifully kills the Amalekites.**

**1. But he fails to destroy all of their stuff — choosing instead to keep and re-use the most valuable assets — like cattle.**

**2. To the reader this looks like common-sense good-stewardship.**

**3. But for this, Saul is rejected by God as King.**

**III. Samuel grieves over this rejection of the newly appointed king and God arrives to call him out of grief and into action.**

**A. *Anointing a new king before the old king is dead!***

**B. What is God thinking? Samuel is understandably concerned.**

**1. He knows that to do this is to instigate a coup.**

**2. He knows this is treason in the eyes of all.**

**3. He knows that Saul will kill him . . .**

- C. So he mentions these concerns to YAHWEH
- D. God gives him a cover-story — Tell them you are simply going to worship in Bethlehem. Take a cow, make a sacrifice, and use this ruse to allow you to identify and anoint the new king from among Jesse’s sons.

#### IV. Samuel does as instructed

- A. Jesse and his sons are invited to the sacrifice
- B. Samuel keeps his eyes peeled to identify the new king
  - 1. As soon as Eliab came by he was certain this guy *looked* like a king.
- C. But God intervenes and reminds him that while *we* look on the outside of a person, *God* is concerned with their heart.
  - 1. There is a bit of humor later when David *finally* is brought before Samuel because the narrator of this story cannot resist mentioning that David is “rudy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome.”
  - 2. God may look on the inside - but the narrator wants us to know David is eye-candy too.

#### V. So what are we to make of this story about a cow and a coup and a comely king? What is the lesson for us?

- A. I’m sure there are some who would see Donald Trump’s election as a sign of God’s favor...

- B. No doubt there are otherss who would see Biden’s election as a sign of God’s favor.**
- C. It is a common practice to wonder who our “King David” is. — BUT**
- D. Last week Alan’s message did a fine job of lining out why we should take to heart the wisdom of scripture and do as the Psalmist says,**

*Psa. 146:3 Do not put your trust in princes,  
in mortals, in whom there is no help.*

*4 When their breath departs, they return to the earth;  
on that very day their plans perish.*

- E. Let us keep in mind, that while David served as king a long time, and while he enjoyed God’s blessing — he was far from a perfect person and far from a godly king**
  - 1. I need mention only Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite to make my point about this.**
- E. So I am disinclined to read today’s text in the arena of national politics.**
  - 1. God is neither Democrat, nor Republican, nor Libertarian, nor independent.**
  - 2. We can have our political views and feel passionately about them, but we should be slow to assume that they are God’s views.**

**VI. Rather, I wonder about leadership in the church.**

- A. The old saying which sounds about right even though I’ve never seen the actual research to back it up is that 20% of the people in any given congregation accomplish 80% of the ministry.**
  - 1. The actual percentages are less important than the idea they attempt to illustrate — why are we so ineffective in inviting people to enact their faith in some tangible expression of gratitude?**
- B. In one former congregation we were committed to making “Every Member a Minister” which was our vision statement/motto.**

1. **In that church every committee and ministry team was asked to make a commitment that whenever they needed to seek additional help from more people - that they make their list of potential candidates and then exclude the top three names.**
  2. **The idea was that the first people we think of to help are often the “go to” people that we (and *everyone*) think of and we need to reach out past those over-committed people to the many others who have gifts to share but who go unnoticed.**
    - a. **In the context of the 1 Samuel story today, they are the ones out herding the sheep - who haven’t even been invited to the meal yet.**
- C. You may have noticed that our Congregational Nominating Committee is actively seeking suggestions as they prayerfully prepare a slate of nominations of leaders for this community of faith.**
1. **I hope you will earnestly and prayerfully consider if you or someone you know is ready to serve.**
  2. **Signs of a calling to serve are things like these:**
    - † **A person of compassion**
    - † **Wisdom**
    - † **Diligence**
    - † **Earnestness**
    - † **Someone who “plays well with other children.”**

- † Humility and a willingness to learn
- † Patience & Gentleness

**VII. So I wonder how many of us today have gifts to share?**

- A. How many have not yet been noticed by a system which seems only able to notice what's on the outside - rather than what is on the inside?**
- B. At work, at home, in our extended family, and here at church — who are the ones we might invite to the banquet? Who are the ones stuck doing the inglorious shepherding and who might be ready to be anointed?**
- C. Your pastor is going to be thinking about this during the weeks ahead and I invite you to do the same.**
  - 1. There is much that God desires to do in this world and to get it done will require that many of us are identified and blessed and anointed and sent out in ministry.**
  - 2. The proverbial 20% will never be enough to meet the need.**
  - 3. The Kingdom requires at “every member be a minister.”**