

Former Prophet
I Samuel 8:4-11, 12-15, 16-20; 11:14-15)

When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. ²The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beer-sheba. ³Yet his sons did not follow in his ways, but turned aside after gain; they took bribes and perverted justice.

4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, ⁵and said to him, 'You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.'

⁶But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, 'Give us a king to govern us.' Samuel prayed to the LORD, ⁷and the LORD said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. ⁸Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. ⁹Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.'

10 So Samuel reported all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹He said, 'These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots;

¹²and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. ¹³He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. ¹⁵He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers.

¹⁶He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. ¹⁷He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. ¹⁸And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not answer you in that day.'

19 But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, 'No! but we are determined to have a king over us, ²⁰so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.'

²¹When Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD. ²²The LORD said to Samuel, 'Listen to their voice and set a king over them.' Samuel then said to the people of Israel, 'Each of you return home.'

11:¹⁴ Samuel said to the people, 'Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship.' ¹⁵So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they sacrificed offerings of well-being before the LORD, and there Saul and all the Israelites rejoiced greatly.

Reading the Former Prophet This Week

The revised lectionary chooses this selection
To introduce in worship Samuel's resistance to monarchy
Leading to the (re)coronation of Saul at Gilgal

Take a longer tour, with audio and notes a chapter-a-day
At www.hereticslikeus.com
Intended for an audience preparing for or following up worship

Last Sunday, Samuel was a child, ward of Eli at Shiloh
This Sunday, he's an old man, with adult sons
Who stray very much like Eli's sons before them

In this broad transition from the era of judges,
Samuel and his sons may be the last,
And he is redefined in hindsight in a 'prophet' role

The elders come to Ramah, Rachel's tomb,
Not the old Shiloh shrine north, nor his son's Beer-sheba south
And Israel demands that he appoint a king, like other nations'

In this 2024 season of succession in many nations
What constitutional crises to you recognize,
And how is leadership authority legitimized?

Samuel, resisting in prayer, hears divine agreement –
Monarchy is rejecting direct divine rule –
Give them what they ask – but warn them

Samuel's warning is of taxation and conscription,
Abuse of power and personal enrichment,
Given a little, taking a lot

The people counter that a king will fight battles for them,
Governing like other nations
So they make Saul king – at Gilgal.

Epistle

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

13 But just as we have the same spirit of faith
that is in accordance with scripture
—'I believed, and so I spoke'—
we also believe, and so we speak,
¹⁴because we know
that the one who raised the Lord Jesus
will raise us also with Jesus,
and will bring us with you into his presence.

¹⁵Yes, everything is for your sake,
so that grace,
as it extends to more and more people,
may increase thanksgiving,
to the glory of God.

16 So we do not lose heart.
Even though our outer nature is wasting away,
our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

¹⁷For this slight momentary affliction
is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory
beyond all measure,

¹⁸because we look
not at what can be seen
but at what cannot be seen;
for what can be seen is temporary,
but what cannot be seen is eternal.

For we know that
if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed,
we have a building from God,
a house not made with hands,
eternal in the heavens.

Reading the Epistle This Week

The lectionary carries on 'seriatim' from last week,
Part of one of Paul's letters back to Corinth
Offering encouragement and hope to adversity

Carrying on from his empathy for struggle in adversity
Paul quotes Psalm 116:10 from the Septuagint
Asserting continuity with the Hebrew scripture covenants

Then Paul reaches further to anticipating being raised,
With Jesus, to Jesus, with the letter's recipients
Part of a growing company to join in this presence

From that vision, he returns to encouragement;
So we do not lose heart...
Contrasting immediate experience with ultimate hope

This recognition of affliction here and now
Preparing us for that glory to come
Has fueled palliative and funeral practice ever since

What are these distinctions in your worldview:
Outer nature/inner nature, Seen/unseen,
Temporary/eternal?

Is the tent/building/temple individual bodies,
or as I hear it, collective, communal singular body,
how is it given rather than built with human hands?

I understand focus on v16-17, pastorally
As I shared affection for v8-9's rhythmic contrasts
But invite a discussion about the bigger context

One goal of religious practice is therapeutic
And our WEIRD subculture rejects metaphysics
But what might mythic imagery offer us?

Gospel Mark 3:20-35

Then he went home;
²⁰and the crowd came together again,
so that they could not even eat.

²¹When his family heard it,
they went out to restrain him,
for people were saying,
'He has gone out of his mind.'

²²And the scribes
who came down from Jerusalem said,
'He has Beelzebul,
and by the ruler of the demons
he casts out demons.'

²³And he called them to him,
and spoke to them in parables,
'How can Satan cast out Satan?

²⁴If a kingdom is divided against itself,
that kingdom cannot stand.

²⁵And if a house is divided against itself,
that house will not be able to stand.

²⁶*And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided,
he cannot stand, but his end has come.*

²⁷*But no one can enter a strong man's house
and plunder his property
without first tying up the strong man;
then indeed the house can be plundered.*

Reading the Gospel this Week

Here the lectionary leaps, from Mark 3:6 last week
Skipping a mountaintop empowering of 12 as exorcists
Reading 3 chapters about separating a serving community

It's a 'Markan sandwich', first of half a dozen uses of technique:
(sandwiches include 6:7-13/30-32; 9:37/41; 11:12-14/20-26;
14:1-2/10-11; 14:54/66-72)

- A Jesus and the crowd – v 20
- B Jesus' family appears – v 21
- C The accusation of the scribes – v22
- C' Response to the scribes – v 23-30
- B' The family reappears – v 31
- A' Jesus and the crowd – v 32-35

The bread is a story about Jesus and his family
The filling is the scribes vs Jesus about the diabolical
How does each enhance the other?

We might enjoy a discussion of 'family values'
Or speculate on cultures of mental illness or possession
Or anticipate church union with me – ecclesiology!

How do you imagine Mark's (or Jesus') worldview,
With room for Beelzebul, Satan, among demons?
How do you translate or reconcile to your own?

I wince at our glib liberal condescension, above it all,
while a majority in polls of peers report magical thinking,
of angels & demons, 'bigger than us, smaller than God'