

(Summarized, sermon was not read)

1 Samuel 8:4-20

Introduction (context)

In our liturgy, we just sang the song from Taize “the kingdom of God is justice and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Come, Lord and **open in us the gates of your kingdom.**” This really captures the central message of today’s passage. A passage central to the history of Israel. A turning point. A request from the people to have a king in order to be like the other nations. The gates of God’s kingdom were closed in Israel.

Perhaps it was the many battles, the many struggles. Perhaps it was seeing the nations surrounding them grow in power. The Hittites, The Philistines. All with kings and an organized army. God did provide shelter in the times of the judges. God did deliver them multiple times from the hands of the enemy. Yet, Israel was different and it seemed that the “other nations” had more control over their situation.

The gates of God’s kingdom were closed, and they wanted to establish their own kingdom, placing things under their own hands.

Context

From the beginning, Israel was called to be different. God chose an elder to leave his home to establish a nation. A nation not defined by kings, power, architecture...but a nation defined by trust. By faith. This is how Abraham’s journey began. Not with a conquest, but with trust.

In the time of the text, Mesopotamia is an area surrounded by kings. Kings that were considered gods. Kings, who were told to be descended by the gods. Kings descended **from above**. Like the Egyptian Pharaohs and tales found in the Code of Hammurabi.

On the other hand, Israel wanted to establish their kingdom **from below**. Based on what “the other nations” were doing. In the time of this text, a sense of national identity is being established. For the first time, Israel has a judge in Samuel that has a national role. Whereas before, judges were local and regional. Moreover, for the first time, a judge appoints his sons to take over the role of a judge. No other judge before Samuel, appointed their children to be the next judges. It seems that things were already in one way or another heading towards heredity.

Point 1: But it was never just about having a king

The elders come to Samuel, bluntly saying that he is old and his sons do not follow the ways of the Torah. They explicitly said that they needed a king to fight their battles and to reign over

them. No word about God's reign, no word about God's will. Simply, give us a king, so "we could be like the other nations". Even though they did mention Samuel's sons wrong ways (see 1 Samuel 8:1-3), was it really expected that a king would hinder problems such as bribery and dishonest gains? In verse 20, they don't even mention what the sons of Samuel were doing, saying that "we want a king....then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles." Isn't this what God has been doing with Israel? Didn't God say that He would fight their battles and lead the nation? Didn't God say that He will be their king and rule over them long before (see Deut 33:5). Even other nations said that God was the king of Israel (see Num 23:21).

I believe bringing Samuel's age and his sons was a pretext. And even having a king itself was not really the main issue. The main issue was trust. Being able to see someone who plays the role of having things under his or her control.

The gates of God's kingdom were closed in their hearts. And so they looked for something tangible, a symbol, a physical person, who would be able to provide a visible sense of security with armies and government. Kings provide a sense of security, a national identity. It is Israel handing over their insecurity, fears, uncertainty to a monarchy, a king, to protect them. Hoping that this system will satisfy their need for security and control. It is letting a person give them a sense of security with his or her armies. Powerful palaces. Towers and walls.

It is looking for a person, and making the person more than he or she actually is. An unfailable super human with powers to rule, gold, crown and armies as physical confirmations of security, power and identity.

But God called Israel to be different.

There were no armies established, no commanders. God raised failable common individuals such as Moses, who couldn't speak right and was a murderer. Such as Gideon, who said he was a coward. These individuals were called to be used by God, in their fallacy, to rescue the people. But now Israel wanted to take things into their own hands by establishing a monarchy.

Point 2: Dealing with the real issue

God sees Samuel's frustration as Samuel approaches God in prayer, but tells Him that they are not rejecting his sons, nor Samuel himself, but they are rejecting God as their king. Something that has been the case from the day that God brought them out of Egypt until this day. It was not something new. It was a known problem that came in a different situation. The rejection of the trust in God. Perhaps things would've been different if the people simply asked for God's direction in the situation. Perhaps God Himself would have offered them a king. But as we saw, it was never about having a king, nor an established army, it was about not trusting God to take control over the situation.

Even later with Saul, David and all other kings, God remained faithful to Israel. Even when their temples, palaces, armies and kings were destroyed. Even in exile. God remains faithful. To the point that later places His own son Jesus, to truly rule over them. At the same time, God always maintained things under His control. With or without a king. From Genesis until the new heavens and the new earth.

God never called Israel to become an Empire. But to be a blessing to all nations. Later, Jesus defines us as salt of the earth. No matter the context.

How many times do we make decisions and do things because we want to be like the “other nations”?

When do we let ourselves be consumed by the pressures of society? To have control over our finances, to have control over our health, to have control over our future, our careers... Do these things at some point take over God’s role as king in our lives?

Perhaps we see ourselves not being “good enough”, and we look for others to give us a sense of security and control. We might need a king because we might want someone else to take care of our problems. How do we involve God in such situations?

How difficult it is sometimes, when the “other nations” around us, people around us, seem to have all figured it out.

But as we sang, “the kingdom of God is justice and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Come, Lord and **open** in us the gates of your kingdom.”

I invite you this week to reflect on God’s kingdom in your life. What does it mean to your daily life, to those around you. What does it mean to be different and be salt of the earth? What does trust in God look like in our daily lives?

Let God open up the gates of His kingdom in us.

Amen.