
A Message from Father David...

Israel's True King

When the Israelites demand a king, the prophet Samuel is devastated (1 Samuel 8:1ff). He is devastated because the Israelites want to be like the other nations around them. This is not a good thing, says Samuel. Israel is not meant to conform itself to the practices of other nations, but to lead the other nations by teaching them who the real God is and how to live in relationship with God. Samuel tries to convince the people that God will be their king. But the people protest. They want a king like all the other nations around them. Samuel pleads with Israel, but the people will not listen.

So God tells Samuel to give the people what they want. Israel gets their way. They get king Saul. Saul starts off well and the people congratulate themselves for being so smart. They think Saul will solve all their problems. But it doesn't quite work out that way. Saul's reign ends in disaster. And with only a few exceptions, one bad king after another rules Israel.

By the time Jeremiah begins his ministry the situation is dire. Jeremiah laments, "Woe to the shepherds [i.e. kings] who destroy and scatter the sheep of God's pasture!" (Jeremiah 23:1). Jeremiah confronts the nation, rebuking them for the pain and trouble they have caused by choosing to go their own way. There will be painful consequences for not listening to and obeying God.

Nevertheless, Jeremiah is told by God to speak a word of grace to this beleaguered nation: "But God, will gather the remnant of his flock out of all the lands that he has driven them, and he will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply" (Jeremiah 23:3). God is coming to be Israel's true king. And when he comes he's going to make things right again, says Jeremiah.

When Jesus begins his ministry, he announces that God's kingdom has come. Throughout his life, Jesus shows us what God's kingship is like. Jesus preaches good news to the poor. He proclaims release to prisoners. He gives sight to those who are blind. He sets free those who are oppressed. Jesus shows that God's kingship is about liberating those who are captive to the power of sin. In supreme irony Jesus reveals himself to be Israel's true king not by maneuvering his way into political power, but by dying on a Roman cross and then rising from the dead. His kingship is now an eternal and cosmic one. He rules not only over a single nation, but also over the whole of God's creation.

Blessings,

Father David+
