

Sermon for Sunday 16 June 2024 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost/Father's Day

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13; Psalm 20 (*Insert: alternate leader, people*); 2 Corinthians 5:6-17; Mark 4:26-34

Israel gets a king; the people pray for him; the apostle Paul insists Jesus is the sign of a new reality; Jesus speaks only in parables... and this is Father's Day Sunday.

Where do we start?!

I'll begin with a statement of strong personal belief that our country today is troubled by ideas of masculinity that are not like the masculinity of Jesus. The repeal of *Roe versus Wade* and all these new restrictions on women's bodily choice do not reflect either Jesus' parables or his actions as described in scripture.

As we pray for fathers, let us be honest about our obligation to organize and contribute to fairer policies - on all such matters.

Then let us confess that having a king, or being strong politically in any way, is not the first principle of Christian life. Scripture records great variety in the history of Israel, and political freedom is not nearly as important as obedience to the love and forgiveness and spiritual healing God offers all humans.

Finally, give more attention to Mark's point about parables. They're like good poetry: They take work to understand, and lots of human history shows people doing just the opposite. I find more chances to grow the longer I age. That means the same teaching, the same simple saying, I read or heard from Jesus long ago has fresh energy now. If I put myself in new situations, and accept comments pro and con on my behavior, God gives me the joy of more friends. I'm more willing to ask forgiveness, or try different responses to criticism. That's what I see Jesus' parables are doing. They give lots of angles to simple statements. That makes good prayer material on a daily basis, decade after decade.

We even learn from pain. That's the supreme lesson of the crucifixion, I think. It's not so much Jesus died to save us, as to show us how it's done. Live and die as he ... he being total reality ... he being God in human form ... as he does it, and you, too, will fulfill the promise of your unique soul, and body, and circumstance. God is that close. We are new creations, Paul says, no longer what we were, but freshly minted versions of who we started out as.

These, I see, are some of the shimmerings of today's scriptures, and of the idea of fatherhood. Manhood, boyhood, masculinity, procreation ... they're all full of promise and goodness, just like motherhood and femininity ... The whole creation is glorious beyond anything we can even imagine.

Come and let us enjoy, and do our individual parts in producing more. Amen.

