

March 18, 2021

Read 1 Samuel 8

Key verse: 1 Samuel 8:22

The 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.'

The Right to Do Wrong

There's a refrain from a popular song by the band The Grateful Dead that goes, "What a long strange trip it's been." That could describe the life many of us have lived. In my life I've known many different people, attended many different schools studying many different subjects, and lived in many different places. I've also made many bad decisions in my life, and the memories of those decisions sometimes haunt me.

And yet I must celebrate the freedom that God has given me – the freedom God has given all of us – to make bad decisions. Today's scripture reading tells the story of Israel's insistence on having a king rule over them. Until that time Israel had judges who would muster armies as needed and administer justice, but the people felt that the threat of foreign invasion warranted the formation of a standing army, and the king served as the commander-in-chief. God knew that ceding so much power to one man would be disastrous for Israel as the king would use his power to enslave and terrorize his own people, and yet God told Samuel to give the people what they wanted. God allowed his own people to reject him in favor of a human ruler.

Some like to blame God for all that troubles this world, for not setting things straight when things go awry, but our God, who created us in his image, gave us the gift of freedom, freedom to fail, freedom to make bad choices, and freedom to reject the very God who created them. He did this because he loves us and his greatest desire is for us to love him, and love cannot exist where there is no freedom.

So let us thank our God for the right to do wrong, because in giving us that right God gives us the potential to love him as he loves us.

Prayer: Almighty God, we thank you that you do not use your power to coerce us but rather to convince us of your love for us. Thank you for letting us go astray at times, and for your grace which has protected us despite the errors of our ways. Help us to seek your wisdom and place our trust in your leadership in our lives that we may show the world the wonders of your love. Amen.