



**A Sermon for the 2nd Sunday after Pentecost
June 2, 2024**



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[Second Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

1 Samuel 3:1-10, Mark 2:23-3:6

A King or Not a King? That is the Question

As we enter Ordinary Time, where we will lodge liturgically for about six months, our Old Testament readings will be sequential, telling a story that sounds historical. This story deals with a big question for God's people: A King or Not A King? I'd like to skip through history, and our telling of history, and mention a few high points that deal with the question, A King or Not A King?

Although there are many older examples of societies wrestling with this question, I'll start in 44 BC, when the Romans were struggling with this basic question, A King or not a King. The Romans had a successful governing system, based mostly on military might, but the question of Who Is In Charge? was answered by a system called a Republic, in which no one was truly in charge for very long, may a year or two at most. But then along came Julius Caesar who was a powerful and charismatic military leader. He was close to becoming the King of Rome, something the Romans did not want, so the opposition, hoping to hang on to the Republic, assassinated him. They thought they were doing Rome a favor, but it plunged Rome into civil war, and who should emerge but Caesar's adopted son, Octavian, who became the first Emperor, Augustus. The Romans got a king after all.

Most of the wars and struggles of European history still dealt with the basic question of King or Not a King – just to mention a few negative examples, the execution of the English King Charles the First in 1649; the execution of the King and Queen of France in the French revolution, late 18th century; and the execution of the Tsar of Russia and his family in 1918. All of these events are real factual events, but they are also symbolic, answering the question of King or No King emphatically NO. All of these stories are archetypal – dealing with big issues in the human condition.

And let us not forget that the American colonies were also faced with this issue. The king of England, King George III, and the English government, saw the 13 colonies as their own, to boss around as they liked. Famously,

this did not sit well in America, and colonists declared independence from England, decisively answering the old question of King or No King with a big NO KING, although it took five years of war to achieve.

The Jews had a keen sense of history, and their holy books deal with this question very creatively. Next week we will read about Samuel and God arguing about whether the Israelites should have a king or not. We begin this struggle with the story of Samuel, today hearing how Samuel was called by God to be a great prophet and judge of the Jews. Ultimately, he chooses the first two kings, Saul and David, and with that, we are off and running with narratives about the kings and their struggles. King David is the Jewish archetype for saying Yes (mostly) to the King question, at least for a while. David lived and ruled around 1000 BC, and in our six months of Ordinary Time, we are going to follow the different strands of his story, some told by fans of his, and some who see his flaws quite clearly. By the time we get to Jesus, born when Augustus was Emperor of Rome, the question of kingship was still a live issue. Remember all those discussions between Jesus and Pontius Pilate about whether Jesus is King of the Jews? Jesus turns the whole subject on its head with his somewhat mystical reply, My Kingdom is not of this world.

Our Gospel reading for today also deals with the issue of authority and who makes the rules. Jesus is being attacked by law-abiding Pharisees who object to Jesus doing work on the Sabbath. Jesus makes reference to King David defying rules in earlier times, by giving his men bread in the house of God that was intended for the priests, because the men were hungry. Jesus invokes David as a higher authority than Pharasidic rules. And then he demonstrates that *compassion* is also more important than rules, when he heals the man with a withered hand, right there in the synagogue, on the sabbath.

God's kingdom has different rules, the first being Love God and Love your Neighbor. This command overrules a lot of rules! Jesus goes against the rules for the Sabbath and heals a man with a withered hand. God loves us, no exceptions.

Let us sum this up with a song that echoes the Gospel, where Jesus asked the man, "Stretch out your hand." This could be our response, a beloved hymn, *Precious Lord, take my hand*. Join in if you know it.

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.
Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light,
take my hand, precious Lord, lead me on.

When my way grows drear, precious Lord, linger near,
when my life is almost gone;
hear my cry, hear my call, hold my hand, lest I fall,
take my hand, precious Lord, lead me on.

When the darkness appears and the night draws near,
and the day is past and gone;
at the river I stand, guide my feet, hold my hand,
take my hand, precious Lord, lead me on.