

What's the matter with Saul?

Last week we heard how God and Samuel (his "man on the ground") somewhat reluctantly made the first king of Israel. Saul, tall and handsome (1Sam9;2), good with a sword and ready to be king. God led Samuel to him, pointed him out and set the whole thing up. Samuel anointed him and made him king, and Saul set off on a series of increasingly successful battles clearing Israel's enemies left, right and centre.

Saul's problem was that as he did well, he was inclined to hand out some bonuses to his men and not a few to himself. (A bit like being some Senators perhaps?) But God requires faithfulness, honesty and a degree of self-awareness that is hard to maintain when everyone is singing your praises. (Read 1 Sam 11-15. It's a ripping yarn, really!)

Today we hear of Saul's successor, David. David turned out to be imperfect but honest, foolish but willing to admit it, at fault but ready to be punished and repent. David, full of faults and utterly human, un-whitewashed even by his biographers, is still held up as the model king. Model, perhaps because even when he lied, he knew to return to the truth. He held that self-awareness before God. He was not perfect, but he never shut off God, or thought himself above God's law.

I think, as a leader, it is important to know yourself, your faults and failings, your shortcomings and your weaknesses. After all, everyone else does! So how does a leader, under God, lead and avoid going beyond the line of what is faithful, or fruitful, or good?

Paul in 2 Corinthians 5, which we heard today, says, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil....We must live no longer for ourselves, but for him who died and was raised for us."  
The difference between Saul, who rather enjoyed being Saul, and David, who often bitterly regretted being the fallen man he was,...the difference is that David tried to live for God.

Jesus, in the Gospel of Mark, (4;26-34) today offers a model of understanding leadership. To paraphrase, he says; "Being a leader in the church is like planting lettuce seeds. You just make a trench in soil, scatter in the seeds roughly how the packet tells you, water it a bit and leave it alone. Then the next thing you know is that you're eating salad every day!" I know this because this is what I did this Spring. Then Jesus says; "In fact, working in the Kingdom is even better than that! It's like a kid taking a maple key and planting it in front of your house. By the time she has kids you can hang a swing from it! And everyone sits in its shade to drink lemonade."Which both sum up to say, "Buddy. It's not about you! It's about God! Certainly you have a part to play, but it's just a part."

The matter with Saul was he never got passed the buzz of being made king by God. He didn't know when it was about working for and with God, and when he was getting in the way. He didn't know when to leave centre stage. He couldn't see past himself.

So, how are we doing?

Are we dazzled by our own amazing success?

Are we ready to bring all that we have done as Grace Church before God for an honest assessment?

Do we do this for our own glory or because we want to be God's people here in Scarborough?

Do we think everything that has happened is because we worked so hard, or because God has blessed our efforts and has worked, and is working through us, to make something wonderful and amazing yet to be revealed?

Actually, I am optimistic! I have been impressed by these four years of leading Grace Church. I was asked to write a report on the amalgamation for a committee of the diocese as it looks towards the next set of possible amalgamations. It was a proud feeling I had as I wrote of the things we have done. Full of wonder at the pain and grief and loss we have carried and slowly put back into God's hands as we let go of old churches, old ways, old memories and old friends, and found a way to be new. I looked back at the problems we overcame and at the blessings we have been given. I looked at the hurdles we have found our way over. Finding worship that could hold all of us in God's presence. Finding ways to have a social life without crashing in to each other's traditions. Balancing our finances. "De-clumping" at coffee hour and making friends out of strangers. I remembered the balls of wool we threw around at St Giles on that anniversary and realized, just by the way we sat, that we had been woven by God's Spirit into a new cloth for Him. I told about the way leaders, people with the Spirit of God in them, became our quiet teachers, prophets, healers and models to all of us in how to do this letting go of the past and finding trust to go forwards in faith. And I told of the courage and patience we had to find with this new building; the disappointments and the thrills, as well as the fire alarms at 4am and the long list of deficiencies. No one threw up their hands in despair! And I said how we are beginning to look forward, to look beyond our walls, to do the things we said we wanted to do here. To serve and to teach and to heal and to preach and to worship and to learn. That is our next work. And Graham has been given to us, I think by God, to help us do this well. We need to turn, to shift our attention, now that we are established, and look at God's waiting world. People waiting for deliverance, for good news, for hope, for community, for a home, for salvation.

And here I have a "but" to add. And I add it with sadness and hesitancy. Here it comes...  
But you will do this without me.

I need to announce to you, my congregation, that I am resigning. It feels as if I have poured myself into this work for four years and I find, quite distressingly, that I have nothing else left. I feel exhausted and empty. I feel spiritually and creatively depleted. I am aware that burn-out lies not that far away from where I am. I do not want to go that far!

At the turn of the year I had chest pains and heart palpitations. I had deep fatigue and even less memory than usual. I got confused about things I am normally crystal clear on. I was falling apart. I got checked out for early onset dementia, for heart problems, hearing and blood work. My doctor concluded, "You are exhausted and stressed. You cannot go on this way." My Spiritual Director said, "You are 7/8ths of the way to burn out." My wife, my children and my friends all said, "You need to stop." In the last 6 months I have followed a cognitive therapy course and slowed down. But I know I am not the priest I was 4 years ago, or even 12 months ago. I know I cannot serve you well much longer.

Bishop Patrick has been a good and supportive pastor to me. We agreed that I end my ministry at Grace Church as Summer ends. The Anniversary of Grace Church, on October 4<sup>th</sup> will be a new year under new leadership.

I will simply stop. I intend to spend the rest of the year without work, simply healing and rebuilding with God my spiritual, emotional and creative energies. I will be small and quiet and work with my hands. The new leadership, I am glad to tell you, will be Graham. The Bishop will appoint him priest-in-charge. Over the Summer we will cover for each other's vacations and hand over the reigns. My last Sunday will be on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September.

A good leader, as I read the lections today, needs to follow God and be led away when the time is come. Being the leader at Grace Church has been a blast! Lots of fun, of challenge, of learning, of problems to sort out. And a joy of celebrations, wonders and successes to watch. It has been the hardest four years work of my life! And I regret not one day of it. We have about 3 months to say our goodbyes. But they begin today. God bless us all.