



## Post Christendom

### Reflections on 1 Samuel 8 - *By Karen Stallard, Union Chapel Minister*

Now we are in interesting times - perhaps we are more like the people in Samuel's time than we think.

How can we reflect on this Samuel passage today?

We moan and groan about those who judge, and do a bad job in our country. We wish for leaders who would represent us and do what we want them to do, bringing us power and land and wealth and stability.

But... if we put onto our leaders the role of God we have problems. They will fail us, they will use us, take us to war, take all our crops.

If we let go of our trust in God and God's rule, which surpasses all earthly kingdoms, and instead put our trust in earthly kingdoms then we are going to be disappointed!

I feel much more comfortable with our monarchy now. I don't think the Queen is the kind of Queen that the Israelites wanted, she doesn't wield the same power, and I think as a nation which has embraced democracy it would seem highly inappropriate if she started to do so.



Can you see how we are in an exciting time? For centuries after the Christendom event we have held with the whole King idea, but now we are free from this, and free to explore what it is like to be without a King, but for God to be our King. This makes room for a bit of anarchy, a bit of rebellion, a bit of other worldliness. Perhaps in all of this we might discover a God who does give us life.

But it will always be easy to slip back into the mentality that it would be good to have a King. After all, Kings and Queens of old told people how they should behave, got rid of people who didn't conform and we therefore did not have to face the challenge of living with diversity and difference. As non-conformists we seek to embrace difference and we do this by not having a dictatorial leadership.

I would probably go as far as to say that in a non-conformist church we really shouldn't be having 'an appointed minister'. Yes, we need some leaders amongst us,



but are we colluding with this frightened plea for a King to organise us and tell us what to do because we don't trust God enough to provide as we appoint a minister?

Here is a challenge. What would it be like to not have a minister here at the chapel, but a group who lead worship? I am talking myself out of a job but what does a church Post Christendom really look like? Perhaps we appoint 'judges' perhaps we have prophets like Samuel to help us understand the voice of God; perhaps we should think about what it might be like to be a 'leaderless' people. As Congregationalists I think we are halfway there: we do try to be non-hierarchical in our structures, but I think we still cling onto our Victorian traditions, which were deeply influenced by Christendom. The institutions were established with a Christendom model, perhaps in a last ditch attempt to retain the world of Kings. We now have the freedom to structure ourselves differently.

This is the challenge! I think here at Union Chapel we can take hold of the message of Samuel in a radical way, and think about what church could look like without an earthly King or Queen ruling over it. We could think about what church might look like without one leader guiding it, get rid of me and you could have two part time workers engaging with the community, encouraging people into the worship space. What would that look like?

We are free to explore these things, so let's do it, but beware: we are just like the Israelites, any little sign of hardship and things not working and we want a King to come along and sort it out. God says clearly "you have stopped trusting me" when this happens!