

## **Lent (3) Sovereignty or democracy**

### **How should our fellowship be led?**

As a British person I am a real supporter of democracy. As I look around the world and see what it is like for people living in democracies and others living under dictatorships, I can't help but conclude that democracy is a good thing. However, I have a problem because I also believe in the sovereignty of Christ. When we sing or speak about Jesus as king, I really mean it, I honestly believe it.

In Daniel Chapter 6 there is a very well-known story, "Daniel in the lion's den". This story is not just about Daniel, it is also about king Darius, and perhaps about the nature of sovereignty. Darius is king of the Medes and he has conquered Babylon, he is now the greatest king on earth. He decides to appoint people to run each of his provinces and over these officials he appoints three high officials. As one of the three high officials Daniel soon stands out, he is intelligent, insightful, and wise, but perhaps most important of all he is honest and trustworthy. So, king Darius decides to make Daniel his most important official second only to the king himself.

The other officials quickly become jealous and hatch a plot against Daniel. They say to king Darius that he is the greatest of all kings and advise him to order everyone to only worship and pray to him for the next 30 days. Being human Darius likes this idea and issues the royal decree. By the time he realises that this means he will have to throw Daniel to the lions because Daniel will worship and pray only to God, it is too late. The king is always right, he cannot be wrong and so the king cannot change his mind.

Of course, our king, Jesus, is very different to any human king. Jesus isn't looking to increase his power or wealth, he is the all-powerful creator God, he needs nothing. He isn't looking to make people serve him, instead he is the servant King. He doesn't sacrifice others for his own good, instead he sacrifices himself on the cross for his people. Instead of greed for wealth and power, Jesus is the king of love, grace, and mercy. Jesus is generous, kind, wise, and just.

Why would we choose any other king? Actually, there is one other king, one other person I often choose to put in charge of my life, though I don't know why, things always work out better when I listen to Jesus instead. Of course, that other person is me.

Please pause for a while to think about and if possible, discuss.

Do we trust Jesus enough to allow him to be our King?

Is our fellowship humble enough to allow Jesus to be our King?

Read Ephesians 4:1-16

So, Jesus is my sovereign King, and I wouldn't change it. So why are our Churches run by a curious set of councils and synods? In the Church of England, we have general synod with bishop's clergy and laity, we have diocesan synod, deanery synod, and our own Parochial Church Council. Each having debates, discussion, and votes. This looks a lot like democracy doesn't it?

I'm often ask two questions, firstly, what would you do vicar? After all vicars must have a direct line to God, or if not the vicar then the bishop or archbishop. Instead of synods and councils shouldn't we be led by prophecy. But how would we know which prophet to listen to? The bible has plenty of warnings about bad prophets.

The second question is, why don't you listen to me/others more? It has been suggested that all prospective vicars should be asked "what kind of autocrat they are" before they are appointed. For anyone to claim that they are speaking on behalf of God is potentially dangerous and what happens if two or three people believe they have heard God speaking different messages? How do we sort the good messages from the bad? How do we know it is God not someone or something else?

In the bible there is an example for us to consider. In acts Paul travels to Jerusalem to discuss some difficult issues with the other apostles. Jesus has clearly left Peter in charge but rather than declaring his direct personal knowledge of God's will he calls the leaders of the Church together. They discuss and consider the issues together, then they pray together.

The council of Jerusalem and I believe all of our PCC's and synods, with or without votes, are not about democracy, they are about discernment. Jesus is our King, if our fellowship is to be led by our King, if we are to follow his sovereign will for us, we must come together and pray to collectively discern his will. Never assuming that any one person has "the direct line to God" but that as the body of Christ we must work together, in unity and prayer, to discern and follow the leadership of Jesus our King.

Discernment not democracy! How do you feel about this?

We live in a democracy; our fellowship follows Jesus as King. How can we help other people understand this?

Prayer

What do we need to confess?

What do we need to ask for help with?