

**1 Kings 3:5-15****Luke 22:24-30****Introduction**

I remember, as a child, when out on walks or playing on the rocks at the Beach my brother, sister and I played a game called 'King of the castle'. One of us would jump onto a rock or bank or wall and shout 'I'm the king of the castle, and you're a dirty rascal'. The others would then try to jump higher so they could shout back, 'I'm the King of the castle. Get down you dirty rascal' claiming the rights of 'King of the castle'.

There is something in us as human beings that delights to be important and to lord it over others, to enjoy success and reward. We see this even in the disciples who despite having worked closely with Jesus for three years, learning from him and beginning to understand the nature of the Kingdom of God argued about which of them was the greatest. I think they were, at the time of this discussion aware that Jesus' ministry was about to end and they were jostling for position, anxious to claim their rights to precedence.

Jesus' response was to point them to the contrast with Pagan Rulers who Lord it over their subjects and leaders in the kingdom of God. He tells them, "You are not to be like that. Instead the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. Jesus' entire ministry was one of service as he demonstrated again and again to his disciples. He had come to earth to give his life for us, to bring healing and forgiveness, freedom from sin and a new hope. In order to do this he poured out his whole self. I wonder how it felt for Jesus at the last supper as he was preparing to give himself totally for us to hear his disciples arguing about who was the most important.

I loved working in Hackney. It was very multi-cultural and I loved working amongst Christians from many countries. There were many African Caribbean members of the church and one of the things I really struggled with was the attitude of the African Christians. They had been brought up to offer deference to their church leaders and to treat them as highly important, which may have been a colonial throwback. But in their churches the minister had absolute authority and was given great respect.

I have always firmly believed that as a Christian minister I was called to service so imagine my embarrassment the first time one of my church members prostrated themselves in front of me showing what they considered to be right respect. It was also a big problem at community meals where I like to help to serve the people present, someone would always take my hand and lead me to the head of the table and ask me to be seated and eat the food they had brought for me. I imagine the disciples might have enjoyed it – at that stage in their journey of faith, but I always struggled with it.

**1 Kings 3:5-15****Luke 22:24-30**

Jesus tells us, "I am among you as one who serves".

In Jesus' kingdom things are turned on their heads. The leader comes as the one who serves.

I have been looking at examples of leadership in the Old Testament, when God called people to lead his people as leaders, prophets and kings. One of the things that they all hold in common was their lack of arrogance and sense of inadequacy for the role God was calling them to. In real contrast to the disciples who seemed to have no doubts about their ability to shine and to carry the responsibility that service to their king required.

When God spoke to Moses in the burning bush and called him to rescue the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Moses' response was to say, *"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"*.

When God called Jeremiah to prophecy to the people of Israel he began by telling him how he knew him and had called him

<sup>5</sup> *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."*

<sup>6</sup> *"Alas, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am too young."*

God's response was the same as to all those he called to serve him

*"Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. <sup>8</sup> Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.*

Leading God's people, or reigning as Christian ruler in a country is a calling of service but the wonderful thing is that it comes with the assurance that it is also a partnership, a partnership with God who calls and equips those he calls to lead and to serve.

When Solomon succeeded his father David as King of Israel God came to him in a dream and showed his pleasure in him and support of him by saying to him, *"Ask for whatever you want and I will give it to you"*.

Now I wonder how I would respond to this amazing offer? How would you respond? What would you ask for, good health, wealth security, power? At these times I think all of us would be tempted to ask for money to see

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us through difficult circumstances, many of us would want better health or help in relationships and at work.

Solomon, when offered whatever he wished for by God – felt the weight of responsibility of his calling and asked nothing for himself apart from the tools to carry out his role as King. As King he had power but also an important and demanding role. He felt totally inadequate. Worried by his youth and inexperience he asked God for help,

*<sup>7</sup> "Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. <sup>8</sup> Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. <sup>9</sup> So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"*

God was so delighted with Solomon's humility and reliance on him that he also granted him wealth and power. But at the heart of Solomon's rulership was his understanding of the weight of responsibility he carried and his inadequacy to lead his people on his own. Now I am not saying Solomon was perfect. Like his father before him he had a weakness for women and was led away from closely following God in everything he did. In fact all of the great leaders chosen by God were only too aware of their weakness and, all of them made mistakes in their personal lives and in leadership. But the most important thing to remember is that Christian leadership is a partnership. We are called by God to serve him and his people and he promises to equip and guide us in that role. Christian discipleship is also a partnership because God calls each and everyone of us to serve him and to share the Gospel with the people we know.

Jesus made it clear to his disciples that following him was never going to be the easy option but that he would be there with them leading and guiding through every challenge that lay ahead.

One of the most remarkable things about the late Queen was her sense of service and commitment to her people. She made a broadcast when she was still in her teens committing herself to a life of service to God and her people and she maintained and kept that commitment through her long life, which is why she was loved and respected by so many people.

King Charles, has been the heir to the throne since he was four years old, and could be said to have served a very long apprenticeship. He has made it clear in his coronation service that he too sees his role as one of service and commitment.

**Readings****Called to service****Thriplow/Shepreth****1 Kings 3:5-15****Luke 22:24-30**

Solomon may have been young and inexperienced but he showed wisdom in what he asked for. He was aware of the challenge that lay ahead of him. He knew what he needed

*So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.*

This is a prayer I pray for our new King but also for each of us. That God would give us discernment in our choices, in our thinking and in our understanding so that we can distinguish the paths that God is calling us to and follow him with confidence that he will supply us with everything we need