

Mark 3:20-35 & 1 Sam 8:4-20, 11:14-15
 3 Pentecost, Proper 5B, 6/10/18
 St. Alban's, Annandale
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Give us a King!...Are you crazy?

They said he was crazy. From the outside, it sure looked that way. Certainly, he was obsessed, pursuing a single-minded passion, caring for nothing except the goal he was determined to achieve.

They said he was crazy; HE said he was on a quest, a mission from God. In his case, a quest to claim the Holy Grail. Driven mad by life's tragedies, a man called Parry was convinced that a silver trophy in a photograph was the sacred chalice, or as he said, "God's symbol of divine grace." If he could attain it, he would no longer be tormented by the Red Knight that only HE could see, the one whose flaming torches made him look Satanic.

Parry's obsession is so strong that he convinces others to help him, forming a haphazard community — a family of sorts — of outcasts, strays, and beggars.

In the movie *The Fisher King*¹, Parry — played by Robin Williams — relates the Arthurian legend that fuels his folly. In the tale, a would-be king reaches into a fire to grasp the elusive grail. Before he can touch it, it vanishes, leaving him wounded and without meaning in his life. It's only a simple fool who, years later, can restore him. Finding the king alone and in pain, the fool picks up a cup from the bedside table and offers him a drink. At his touch, it transforms into the long-sought treasure.

"How did you achieve what my brightest and bravest could not?" the king croaks.

"I don't know," the fool replied. "I only knew that you were thirsty."

I only knew that you were thirsty.

I'll let you see the film for yourself to see how Parry achieves his quest and leads his community — not as a kingly figure, but as a fool, touched by divine grace.

¹ Gilliam, Terry, et al. *The fisher king*. Burbank, CA: Columbia TriStar Home Video, 1998.

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Jesus never wanted to be a king — at least not the kind of king that Samuel warned his people against in our first reading today.

“Give us a king!” a group of elders plead. Samuel, prophet and judge, has been enough for them until now. But suddenly they are seized by a yearning to be like other nations, forgetting that generations ago THEIR elders pledged a covenant with their one true King, the LORD. So they plead with Samuel, “Give us a King,” and he answers, in effect, “What, are you crazy?”

Samuel knows what other nations’ kings have done to them. Samuel remembers what the Egyptian king, the Pharaoh, did to the people of God. He tries to talk them out of their folly, in one of the most passionate passages in the Bible about the use, and abuse, of power.

Here’s what a king will do to you, the LORD, through Samuel, warns, and notice there is nothing here about what a king will do FOR you. Notice that the word “take” appears six times, clanking like linKs in a chain, until the final blow...”and you will be slaves.” He will take and take and take, the LORD warns, “take and take and take, and what will he “give” in return? Nothing.

But, “No!” the elders reply, not wanting to hear the truth. “We are determined!” And so the LORD gives them their way, knowing where it will lead, to servitude and hardship and ultimately, to exile in Babylon, when the LORD will not listen to their cries, not for a long, long time.

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Six hundred years after the exile, along comes Jesus, and the power that drives his vision has nothing to do with ‘taking’ and everything to do with giving. So driven was he by this vision that his own family thought him out of his mind, and religious folk called him possessed.

HE said he was on a quest, a mission from God, and he had convinced some that HIS kingdom, the Kingdom of God, was at hand. He only knew that they were thirsty. And so around him formed a community, a *family* of sorts, of outcasts, strays, and beggars, sinners and seekers. When his own family tried to restrain him for his protection, it was the new community he favored, the ones to whom he was giving a second chance, giving redemption, giving hope.

The only one he would take from was the icon of evil, binding the “strong man” Satan, whose only strength was the power to enslave and abuse. “A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand,” he reminded the scribes and others who accused him of being in league with the devil.

Nor can a house divided, and so I like to think that after this encounter, after looking around the table at his new community and declaring “Here are my mother and brothers and sisters,” Jesus made it back home. We know his mother never gave up, we know his brother James became one of the early church’s pillars, and I hope that all of his original family caught the vision of his Kingdom.

It’s that vision for which we are still reaching into the fire. Though we sometimes draw back, wounded like the Fisher King, we know it’s worth the quest. For in the Kingdom of God, the only power that counts is the power of love. It’s love that keeps pouring out on us the chalice of divine grace — just because we are thirsty. It’s love that calls us to be fools for Christ, pursuing his passion and serving the thirsty world in his name.

Amen.