

31st July 2020

1 Samuel 13:5-18

There is a moment, shortly after I've handed over a household task to one of our children, when the feeling of burdens-lifted gives way to a sense of dread and I consider taking back the responsibility for myself. Sometimes they move too slowly and sometimes they move too fast; sometimes I have visions of broken crockery, or the contents of the washing-up bowl on the floor; sometimes it's difficult to put my finger on why I want to wrest back control that I've so recently ceded.

From the instant of Sarah's miraculous conception, the story of God has been the story of a people. Of course, some individuals play prominent roles within this story –there *are* those we designate 'heroes' – but God wants collaboration and a sharing of responsibility. Even Moses needed to rely on his brother and sister to lead the exodus out of Egypt. A single figure who performs all necessary tasks themselves, failing to delegate, has too much power, such that they may begin to see themselves as gods in their own right. This is surely part of the argument against appointing a king over Israel in the earlier chapters of 1 Samuel.

In today's reading it is easy to have sympathy for Saul. He sees what needs to be done and Samuel, his collaborator, is running late. As far as Saul is concerned, time is of the essence, and so he does what I do when I snatch back a job I've just assigned to one of my children. He says, 'I'd better just do this myself' and he does it; he performs the sacrifices that Samuel would have performed had he been there.

The trouble with this is that it betrays a twofold lack of trust on Saul's part. First of all, it demonstrates that he does not trust in God's plan. Samuel accuses Saul of having broken God's commandment, and although the text does not explicitly tell us what this commandment is, it makes sense to assume it was about waiting for Samuel's arrival. Secondly, Saul's act shows that he does not trust in the other people God has placed around him to perform their assigned duties. Samuel was the one who should have offered the sacrifice and Saul made himself all-powerful when he assumed Samuel's role as well as his own. It is Saul's lack of confidence in God and in others that Samuel addresses when he appears in verse 11.

Do we, in the present day, have confidence in God and in the other people around us, with whom we work to further God's kingdom? Do we happily give up responsibility to our colleagues and friends, or do we need to ask God for the grace to let go and allow others to carry the burden sometimes, even if, secretly, we think we could perform the task just as well?

God, we thank you for our church family, for all the people you have placed alongside us as we seek to follow you; help us to trust in you and to trust in them, working collaboratively towards the coming of your kingdom. Amen.