Sermon: **We want a king**. (1 Samuel 8.19)

An alien from another galaxy lands in Israel 3000+ years ago, and says “Take me to Your Leader”, what happens? The ‘Judges’ over Israel were not really leaders, but acted on behalf of God. The Israelites could say God was their leader but would the aliens understand? Anywhere else nearby aliens would be shown the king. Here is the problem. TEXT. What does it mean to say that God is king? Who is to interpret what God says? Self-appointed demagogues? Hereditary kings? Randomly chosen ‘Judges’?

NB Judges were imperfect – Ehud was left-handed (a sign of weakness then), Deborah was a woman, Gideon was full of doubt, Abimelech ambitious, Japhthah impulsive, Samson a philanderer and practical joker. Yet God used these to deliver a repentant Israel time and time again. Samuel’s sons were “**interested only in making money**” (1 Samuel 8.3). Like looking for a new presbyter, the pool was quite shallow!

What system of government is best for a church? Some *presbyters* like to rule, dictating policy, and making all the decisions. Some *individuals or small groups* rule, ensuring no changes occur which do not ‘fit’. A *Parish Council* can be ruled by one person, who may not have the church’s best interests in mind. Rule by the ‘*people*’? So easily ‘the people’ don’t know what’s best for them. TEXT. How can *God* rule?

Samuel said how a king would act – make sons his soldiers, others would plough his fields, daughters prepare food, he’d confiscate the best land, collect a tithe of produce, and animals, and enslave all. Israel still said yes –did they not believe him or were they prepared to pay the price? But how can *God* rule?

Geneva was a theoretical theocracy (rule by God) under John Calvin. But God’s rule had to be interpreted; who better than human religious leaders who were sure they had got it right?! No system is without flaw or corruption – one person, small group, the people – all can make mistakes or be blinded. How can *God* rule?

It is easy to say ‘use prayer’, ‘read the Bible’ but the problem is not just how do you know what is God’s way, but do you really want to go God’s way? Only if you answer that second question as ‘yes’ is the first relevant.

Humility, patience, careful listening to all voices, including the ‘least’ are all required.

TEXT – we have a king, Jesus. Somehow in all our decisions we need to hear his voice and have the courage to go his way – for in the end he loves us more than we love ourselves and he knows best.