

St. Ninian's Parish Church
Sunday 19th May 2019
CHOIR SERVICE/ 175th ANNIVERSARY

Psalm 21: 1 - 7; 1 Kings 1: 32 – 40; Hebrews 4: 14 - 16

Who rules? Who is in charge? Who has power? That question, 'who rules' never goes away. Haven't we learned that in our country over the past three years? Is it the Government who rules, or Parliament, or is it the people who rule when they express themselves in elections or referenda? Who rules?

That question never goes away. It was there millennia ago in the lives of the ancient Israelites. The first five books of the Old Testament describe the establishment of the people of Israel under the Law. For them the Law ruled. But, then Israel formed itself into a state. In the pages of the Old Testament Books of First and Second Samuel and First and Second Kings, we hear the debate that took place back then over whether Israel should have a king like all the other states around it, or whether it should be ruled by priests who derived their authority from God.

The anthems we will listen to this morning take their inspiration from the Scripture verses we just heard. They reflect that debate in ancient Israel over who rules, priests or kings - and they give voice to the compromise that was reached back - the priests would anoint the king; Zadock, the priest anointed Solomon, the king.

G. F. Handel who wrote these pieces took their texts from the coronation of the Stewart king James VII of Scotland and 2nd of England in 1685, but they were first sung at the coronation of the Hanoverian king George the Second in 1727. In those fifty years Britain had undergone a bloody debate and a revolution, and had moved from a monarchy that believed its authority came directly from its hereditary divine right, to a monarchy that was established by the countries' parliaments?

Who rules, was also an issue one hundred and sixteen years later when the Church of Scotland split over whether a congregation's minister should be chosen by the landed gentry, the state effectively, who paid for the minister and his church, or chosen by the congregation itself. St. Ninian's, founded a year later, in 1844, was a congregation of those people who broke away from the established church, believing that in church matters it was the congregation that ruled, not the state.

As we celebrate this morning the calling and ministry of St. Ninian's choir, and St. Ninian's 175th anniversary, we hear the sound of debates echoing down the centuries and millennia about who, on earth, should hold power, and where that power ultimately comes from. The coronation anthems reflect the compromise that both Israel and Britain eventually came to, over how power should be shared, and as the present day congregation of St. Ninian's, which returned to the fold of the established church in 1929, we too are the product of a compromise over earthly power.

But, in the anthems we are about to listen to that were born in this debate over earthly power, we hear the assertion that in all things the ultimate monarch is God. And, as the reading from the book of Hebrews, which we will hear read between the anthems, reminds us, Jesus Christ was not just the incarnation of God, the King of Kings, the ruler of rulers, but he was also the great High Priest of God; he embodied the ancient compromise. He is the king of our lives, and through his priesthood we are able to stand before the throne of God in heaven, to know him directly no matter which monarch, or parliament or government, or people holds power on earth.