

Consensus is hard (2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10)

When David was anointed, no one voted.

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No one voted. As the story of David's anointing goes, elders from all the tribes of Israel gathered and, recognizing him as the one the Lord had chosen, made him king by acclaim. It wasn't a democracy, and no one voted. They acted together. They gathered and remembered together what God had promised to David. They affirmed that God's will would be their will and they anointed him.

Consensus—a shared sense of things, or, we might say, common sense—is a beautiful thing when it happens. For several years in my young adulthood I attended Quaker meetings that left me with a lasting admiration for the ways local congregations make decisions. They do it prayerfully, patiently, taking the time it takes to reach consensus. Their meetings begin in shared silence as they listen together for guidance. They reflect on what God has already done and is doing—what is unfolding among them. Just as God anointed David to be Israel's king long before the elders gathered to make it official and prepared the way in a series of victories and displacements, so what has already been ordained and accomplished by divine action needs to be recognized and taken into account

Consensus depends on historical as well as spiritual awareness. We need people among us who know the backstory. We need people who know how language evolves and how context changes and how a living word differs from one that lies

dead on the page.

National elections can't happen by consensus. Voting is the best approximation we can achieve on that scale. Our instruments of collective discernment are flawed at best: polls, news outlets, candidates' voting records, simplified representations of complex public issues, representatives who somehow try to hear the voices of constituents amid the noise. But like the ancient tribal elders, we recognize the need to pray for a ruler who will be open to divine guidance, fair and faithful, who will seek the common sense of those who depend on wise exercise of power.

Unlike the moment of David's ascent by widely shared consent, we live in a moment of widespread and bitter conflict. Consensus seems unreachable. Still, we may gather to seek it, pooling information and perspectives, holding one another accountable in circles of trust, praying for guidance, testing the spirits, being willing to learn, listening for the voice of the Spirit who so often speaks when we enter into intentional silence. And then entering the wider public forum humbly and hopefully, wise as serpents, doing no harm, making the choices given to us with confidence, knowing empires rise and fall and God's ways are not our ways, praying nevertheless to hold steady and keep our eyes and our hearts wide open.