

Hopkins South Monterey

United Methodist Church

Affecting Lives Through Jesus Christ

Scripture & Sermon

June 13, 2021

Pastor Kelsey

1 Samuel 15:34-16:13

34 Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul. 35 Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel.

16 The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." 2 Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' 3 Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." 4 Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" 5 He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

6 When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." 7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." 8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." 9 Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." 10 Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." 11 Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." 12 He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Prayer & Sermon

God of love and grace,

Thank you for this time to be together. Thank you for this time with you. Bless this time we have to spend with your Word. Help us to hear what you know we need to hear, and help us to put what we learn about you and ourselves into action. In the name of the Son and Spirit, Amen.

This week brings us to week 2 of our God at Work series. Last week we read about Israel's request for a King and their insistence despite God's warnings through Samuel that it wasn't a good idea that they wanted it. The story reminds us that God Responds as God responded to their request, and in the end granted their request, telling Samuel to appoint Saul as King.

This week, the story from 1 Samuel 15-16 tells us of the aftermath of the doomed rule of Saul. The chapters between 11, when Saul was appointed, and this week's text tells us of Saul's mediocre rule. What God said would happen with the drafts, taxes, and taking of land and goods all comes to pass under Saul's rule. But all that isn't what made God regret appointing him. Saul made the same big mistake twice, turning away from God's guidance given by Samuel and taking the advice of his soldiers. The first time it happened, God warned Saul and gave him the consequences of banning his sons from following him into kingship. When Saul showed he was easily tempted toward human values and paths again, God decided he could no longer trust Saul with such an important job for the rest of his life. God rejected Saul as king. That brings us to the beginning of our passage from today. Samuel has shared with Saul God's decision and leaves to never see him again. Samuel grieves over Saul, perhaps for the failure of his kingship, perhaps for having to be the one to share the bad news, or perhaps that Saul didn't work out and he regrets his part of appointing him. Either way, God gave him some space to grieve, but before he could wallow, God sent him out with a new purpose: Go identify the next King. God directs Samuel to go have a visit with Jesse the Bethlehemite who has a son that will be the next King. But God doesn't want this appointment of the King to be so public this time. They all saw how that turned out with Saul. So, God sends Samuel quietly, not even letting Jesse in on it to begin with, instead saying he was there to lead their family in a sacrifice ritual. So, Samuel went to Bethlehem and invited Jesse to the event. Jesse came and brought his sons. Samuel made his way down the line of Jesse's children, starting with the oldest. Samuel took one look at the impressive eldest son and thought, "Surely he has gotta be it! He is perfect King material! He looks muscular and intelligent and hearty. He would win battles like those other kings. Surely this is who God sent me to anoint." Samuel was pumped that his job seemed to be that easy.

But God stopped him short. "Ah ah ah! Not so fast, don't be getting out your oil yet, bud. You're basing your opinion on the wrong things. What I value in a king is not appearances, even strength or height or looks. I know you mortal humans have a hard time looking past those things, but I look right past those things and look at the heart, I see right to the inside. That's what I am looking at for our king." Samuel basically said,

“Okay, boss! Jesse, your next son?” So, Eliab was passed over, then Abinadab, then Shammah, then four more. None of them struck God’s fancy. Samuel was at a loss. God said one of these sons would be the one! So, bewildered, he asks Jesse the only thing he had left, “Sooo uhhhhh, are these all your sons?” Alas, they were not! Jesse shares, “Well, no, actually. There is one more, the youngest. He is not here because he is keeping the sheep.” Back when this text was written, shepherding was a common metaphor for the work of a King, so Jesse’s response would have been a piece of comedy in this story, “Oh, well there’s the youngest, don’t worry about him, he is just out doing the work of a king.” Beyond the comedy, this also let’s the audience know that this youngest one will be the one that is just right, to borrow from the tale of Goldilocks and the 3 bears. Samuel urges Jesse to send for the boy to join them, and in came little, sun worn David. God let Samuel know that this is the one and instructs him to anoint David. The text says that with that anointing the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. Samuel’s job was done and he moved to the next town.

This passage of scripture is yet another entertaining short story that gives us some good reminders about God, Us, and how we work together. One of the main takeaways we can have from this passage is that God sees. God speaks to Samuel of seeing through the big brawny brothers appearances to recognize the truth of their hearts. Their appearance, their strength, their beauty, their age doesn’t make them more or less capable of being the leader of their nation. What matters, is what God can best see, what is in their heart, their mind, their moral center. God sees David from the fields and sees who he is inside and who he will grow up to be. God sees what his brothers and father likely did not. There was nothing about David that would make them expect him to be named the next king. He was a kid, he was working a lowly job tending the livestock, he is easily ignored. His family left him out in the field with the sheep, thinking he wasn’t even worth being part of the sacrifice ritual tale that Samuel told them. So, surely they were quite flabbergasted that their littlest brother was the one chosen to be the next King by God. God sees David for who he was and will be, leading with heart and not just physical ability. Now, this does not mean that David will be the most perfect King for his whole reign. Nah, he has his own low points in his leadership, but he also does a lot of good, it is upon David that God builds the Kingdom, builds up the Israelite people, builds up their faith, and it is that line that continues on to Jesus. As David started his life in leadership by being out tending the flock, when David is doing that kind of work but for his people, he is at his best. He gets tripped up and things don’t go well when he strays from that focus and instead gets a big head and takes on some pride and materialism. But, God knows that no King will be perfect. God said it from the get-go of this whole King idea. With David, God focuses on the good, seeing David’s true heart, before it is affected by power.

God does not just see Samuel’s and Jesse’s family’s hearts though. God does not just say God only looks at the hearts of potential kings. God shares, “they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” God sees all of us for more than our outward appearances. That may seem like more of a threat than good news, in an “oh no, God sees right through us,” kind of way. But, knowing our God is graceful, and hearing how God used seeing our hearts in the story with David. I think it can mean a lot more than a warning that God knows when we are falling short. That part is true,

we cannot fool God with whatever facade we share, but there is also a lot of grace and hope in it. God sees the good in us just as much. God sees past whatever fronts we put up with others, God sees past the walls and appearances we try to put up for others. God knows what is true to our heart. God sees our intentions and what is close to our hearts. God sees the care and love we have for others even when we cannot find a way to express it. Looking toward our communities, God focusing on our heart instead of appearances means that God is not limited by social constructs, but the social barriers we erect between ourselves. God sees outside the box or outside the room and sees those who others wouldn't expect to be good leaders or contributors of whatever project.. God sees the potential in those even if they aren't in the room or not even invited to join in. God sees us for who we truly are.

We will never be all-seeing or all-knowing like God, and honestly, I'm glad I don't have to be. But since we are not, we will never be able to see others' hearts the same way God does. But, we can work to follow God's lead, be counter cultural and focus more on what people bring from the heart instead of in appearances. We can join God in raising leaders among us that care for the flock, care for people like God does, instead of those who look good and only care about looking good themselves. We can join God in the radical inclusion that this value points us toward, looking to individual's hearts instead of whatever we could assume based on what is on the outside. Whether that be clothes, hair, material goods, skin color, race, nationality, gender or sexual identity, disability, or these days mask wearing. For example, here in Michigan that could mean not automatically booing and hissing at someone wearing Ohio State garb. Just as our text today even seemed to go against its own advice and comment on David's ruddy complexion and beautiful eyes, this doesn't mean that outward presentation has zero significance. We should try to do what we can with what we can control about how we present ourselves in the world to match with our hearts. But, our appearance can't and shouldn't be what makes our decision about someone's worth or abilities. Let us work to see as God sees, looking for those that God is anointing in the most unexpected and remarkable places. Let us work to see as God sees, recognizing the astonishing and loving bits in those we meet. Let us work to see as God sees, seeking out those who we wouldn't think to invite to be in the room and see their worth in being there. Let us see as God sees, leaving behind the material values and social barriers that we humans construct to make some the "least of these" and others the most. Let us see what God sees in each of us, and in all those we meet. Let us see as God sees and notice the potential for the Kingdom of God to be made on earth as it is in heaven if we take a chance on someone. Let us see as God sees and watch our community and maybe even the world change for the better.

Let us pray.

Patient Lord, you know how we are. We let the frustrations and worries of our lives overcome us. Our hearts seem to buckle under the weight of anger and confusion. And we turn away from you, sure that you can do nothing to alleviate our strife.

Holy God, You call us to place our trust in you, to live according to your direction. Yet we want life to make sense from a human point of view.

It's hard to live by faith. You call us to feel the mystery of life, to marvel at the power of your love. Yet it's not easy to accept your promise that everything old has passed away. It's hard to live by faith. Forgive us, holy maker of reality. Forgive us for playing god instead of accepting our humanity.

Help us to learn that you are actively involved in our lives, not as a "puppet master" but as a creative co-worker, seeking healing and hope not only for each of us, but for the whole world. Make us into disciples of peace and compassion; for we ask this in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

Scripture assures us:

Fear not, for our creator, the loving maker of all reality, forgives us, and redeems us from violence and oppression. God sows the good news in tiny seeds, inviting us to tend the soil of community, and marvel as they grow. God invites us to see as God sees. And God sees the depth of your heart, seeing where there is compassion and love and sees where there is fertile soil for that to grow. God pours God's love on you, in you and through you to others. Be at peace. AMEN.