

**June 16, 2024**

**1 Samuel 15:34 - 16:13**

**Sermon Title: The Chosen**

*<sup>34</sup> Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul. <sup>35</sup> 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." <sup>2</sup> 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.' <sup>3</sup> 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." <sup>4</sup> 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?" <sup>5</sup> 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.*

*<sup>6</sup> When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely his anointed is now before the Lord." <sup>7</sup> 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." <sup>8</sup> Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." <sup>9</sup> Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." <sup>10</sup> Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." <sup>11</sup> 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." <sup>12</sup> 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." <sup>13</sup> 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.*

Please pray with me:

God be in our heads and in our understanding. God be in our eyes and in our looking. God be in our mouths and in our speaking. God be in our hearts and in our thinking. Amen.

Picking the right person for the job can be tricky business. My husband has been mystified more than once at some of the draft choices of the Cleveland Browns. Cleveland has proven that you can pick a great athlete but if their head is in the wrong place it doesn't matter, they are the next Johnny Manziel. When all your hopes are riding on one person the choice is never as simple or obvious as choosing Charles Barkley to be on your playground basketball team.

In the process of choosing an individual to be king over the people of Israel, God has already made one mistake. You heard me right. God made a mistake. Sit with that for a minute. That is a sermon for another Sunday. Our story for today opens with God confessing that God regrets making Saul the first king. That sounds like a mistake to me.

Determined not to do that again, God sets out to choose a new king. There is just one problem, Saul is still king. The great priest, judge, and prophet, Samuel is well aware of this danger as God tells Samuel to go anoint a new king. "He'll kill me," is Samuel's response.

So, God creates for Samuel a cover story. Just tell the king you are going to Bethlehem to make a sacrifice. "You're a priest, Samuel, you can do that." God sends Samuel to the town of Bethlehem, with his sacrificial animal in tow, and tells him to find a man named Jesse and invite him to the sacrifice. God will tell him what to do next.

The elders of Bethlehem welcome Samuel with trepidation, unsure about why he is there. Samuel assures them that he comes in peace, and he goes on to make the participants ready for the sacrifice. Jesse is there with his sons, seven of them, and immediately Samuel starts to check them out. Convinced he knows who God will choose, with nothing more than looks to guide him, he stands in front of Eliab, who is tall and strapping, and says to himself, "Surely this is the one."

"Nope," says God. And God instructs Samuel to look beyond the obvious. God says to Samuel, "*the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.*" Samuel moves on to the next son, Abinadab, looking him up and down. Once again God says, "No." Maybe it's the next son, Shammah. No, not that one either. Seven times, one for each son of Jesse, God says, "No, not this one," which leaves Samuel very confused. "Is there something I'm missing here?"

"Do you have any more sons?" Samuel asks Jesse. This is not exactly a shining moment for Jesse. I don't think he has to worry about being nominated for father of the year. There is one more. He's out in the fields with the sheep. Why wasn't he invited to

the sacrifice? Why was he overlooked? You can draw your own conclusions as to why Jesse didn't think to include him.

Samuel, who hasn't yet done what God sent him to do, is annoyed and tells Jesse he can't do anything until this son is brought to him. So they wait.

In walks David, the overlooked one, the unlikely one, straight from the field. Even though we have been told that God does not judge by appearance, Samuel sees a handsome boy, with beautiful eyes and ruddy skin. But God is looking deeper. "This is the one," says God.

Samuel proceeds to anoint David with oil, which is a way of confirming God's selection. Immediately, the spirit falls mightily upon David, and remains with him from that day on. Then Samuel leaves.

That's it. Samuel leaves and we are left to wonder. Does David know he is being anointed to be the next king of Israel? Do his brothers know? Does he ask questions, like when this might happen or what he should do next? We are left to wonder.

The question I have is why the story is told this way. Why the parade of brothers and the seven, "Nos?" Why not just say, "And God chose a shepherd boy named David to be the next king?" It's good storytelling for sure. If we weren't reading it straight out of the Bible, we might think it is a scene from a Disney movie with his buff brothers all vying for Samuel's attention.

Maybe it is told this way to highlight that the choice of David is unexpected. Perhaps God has learned from God's mistake that the obvious choice is not always the best choice. Saul was a foot taller than everyone else, and handsome, but he wasn't the one. Stats and appearance are not as important as one's heart. David has a heart for God, even before his anointing and this is his most important attribute.

Perhaps it was all those nights, sitting alone under a starlit sky, that opened David's heart to God. Garrison Keillor used to say, "When you look at the stars you don't think small." Being responsible for vulnerable animals surely nurtured his capacity for responsibility and caretaking. Playing his lyre, sending songs into heaven surely lifted his soul. Whatever it was, David had a heart that was responsive to God, and this is what God saw.

In the weeks to come, we will hear more about David. We'll learn that he was far from perfect, yet his heart remained open to God. Even when he abused his power and

violated his own integrity, he was able to listen to correction. He had the heart to seek forgiveness. Today it is enough to know that God sees the heart. God sees past our cultural measures of success, and beauty, and giftedness...God see us. God sees what is most important. Physical appearance, and a long list of achievements are not the measure of a person. The color of one's skin or one's gender expression are not the full measure of a person. The location of one's upbringing or immigration status is not the measure of a person. Past failures, and missteps are not the measure of a person. God sees the heart.

And just to be clear – we are not talking xray vision. We are not talking about a beating organ. The heart in ancient Israel was thought to be the core of your being. It is your heart that shapes the decisions you make and the things you value. Proverbs 4:23 encourages us to guard our hearts, because everything we do flows from our heart.

Seeing one's heart is to see what makes them tick as a person. And as people of God, we are challenged guard and nurture our hearts in love and for love. We may never be able to see as God sees, but we can train our eyes to see past the superficial and look at one's heart. .

In a few minutes we will honor our graduates. Today, their joy is our joy as they celebrate a milestone in their lives. They know as well as anyone the pressure to achieve...the pressure to be extraordinary. They know what it is to be graded, compared, and judged by their outward appearance. They might even know what it feels like to be overlooked or to feel like they are too this or that to ever be enough.

But not today.

We have the opportunity as a church to say, "we see you!" We care about your heart. In the church we do cardio – not the kind that makes your heart pound – but the kind that stirs our hearts to love and to be compassionate and open to the mysteries and ways of God. Here we leave the superficial at the door and we go deeper to fashion God-shaped hearts and to pump God's love to the extremities of this world.

The superficial is temporal. Our looks will change. Our success will fade. Our status will rise and fall. Our quest to please everyone else but God will leave us worn out and unfulfilled. But the heart endures. A heart for the things of God can sustain us all the days of our lives and open doors to possibilities beyond our wildest imagining.

The day Samuel rode into town – no one could have imagined David as the next king of Israel. No one could have imagined Mary as a God bearer. No one could have imagined

Jesus, a kid from Nazareth, as Christ (which means anointed) and as example we strive to follow to this day. No one could have imagined Matthew as a disciple. No one could have imagined Zacchaeus as generous. No one could have imagined Peter as the rock, or Paul as an apostle.

And...and...we have yet to imagine how love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – the fruits of the spirit – will radiate from our hearts – giving hope to the hopeless, help to the helpless, healing to brokenness...we can only imagine.

So, this is what I want to say to our graduates. And everyone else is welcome to listen in...

First, you are a beloved child of God. And all the things that make you, you...your experiences, your interests, your abilities, your questions, your loves, your hopes...all these things that are unique to you, are the ingredients of your future. Your heart is the recipe. Your heart is where they all come together and are stirred by the spirit. The result is your gift to the world, and God's gift to you.

We are excited to imagine with you what that might be!