

Fourth Sunday in Lent

ANOINTED

1 Samuel 16:1-13

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Samuel Anoints David

16The 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.' 2Samuel 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."' 3Invite 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.' 4Samuel 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?' 5He 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.' 7But 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.' 8Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, 'Neither has the Lord chosen this one.' 9Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, 'Neither has the Lord chosen this one.' 10Jesse made seven of

his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, 'The Lord has not chosen any of these.' 11Samuel 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.' 12He 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.' 13Then 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.

DIAGNOSIS: Neither This One!

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Passed by*

There are ones who are steadfast and brave, ones who are loyal and smart, there are dastardly ones, wily coyotes, even some who smell like turnips: these are the thousand thousand iterations of humanity, gazing in wide wonder at all that is. They each have dreams and desires, they're all cut from a single bolt of cloth. If you slice them open, they'll each bleed and they'll each hurt.

But that's not enough. There is a Chooser who makes a Choice. One who picks this one but not that one. Esau no, Jacob yes. Rachel no, Leah yes. Son of Kish no, Son of Jesse yes. Eliab no, David yes. Michal no, Bathsheba yes.

The ones that get chosen must be really happy... right? And the thousand thousand who fall, cut and unwanted, to the floor... does no one grieve for them?

The nations... passed by. Lot, Hagar, Ishmael, Esau, Reuben, Naphtali, and the rest, passed by. Joseph's Egypt passed by.

Moses and his generation passed by. Saul and Jonathan passed by. Samuel's sons, Joel and Abijah, passed by. Eliab, Abinadab and their five brothers passed by. Michal passed by. David's dutiful wives passed by. Amnon and Absalom passed by.

This is Yahweh, and Yahweh sees the heart... and Yahweh passes by.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : Heart Failure

Yahweh looks at King Saul and sees a heart problem. Yahweh looks at David's brothers and sees heart problems.

What's the Heart Problem? Something like this: Those who try to save their own lives will lose them. Second-guessing Yahweh. Thinking "I" know better. Thinking for myself. Valuing outward appearances. Yeah. Big problem. Yahweh sees it... and doesn't like it.

Which is totally unfair. We sons of Adam and daughters of Eve come equipped with Survival Instinct. It's a pale version of what our ancestors had but it's still standard issue these days. We look out for us and ours. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all are created equal and ought to pursue life, liberty and happiness. The very best of us can do no more than try to think clearly and make good choices to attain optimum outcomes. We call it "Human Nature," after all! It's the whole point.

And you say Yahweh is going to look at the way we are, at our hearts, and judge us? Who says Yahweh is always right? I mean, what about our consciences! Are we not supposed to follow our consciences!? What about OUR judgment? OUR instincts? How come Yahweh doesn't care about what WE think is best? King Saul is the paradigm of courageous men and women who are simply trying to make lemonade with the lemons of life... and who suffer the rejection of God. Samuel, for one, recognizes this injustice and grieves.

(On the other hand, is being Chosen even a good thing? Why would anyone want to be King of Israel? God would always be “all up in your business,” ordering up disasters to encourage you to repent, sending you annoying prophets, insisting things be done that Certain Proper Way, making you feel guilty when you haven’t kept the Sabbath or ashamed that you were stirred when you looked into sultry eyes. Who’d want to be on that team? Who’d want to be Chosen? Yahweh sees hearts and can tell who’s fit for the burden of responsibility...and passed you by... so...you’re free! Enjoy life! Love your woman! Dote on your grandkids. Build bigger barns. Eat, drink, be merry. Tomorrow you’ll die. Could be worse! You could have been Chosen too!)

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : Rejected

But there it is in black and white. “How long will you grieve over Saul when I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and start walking. I’ve picked someone else. But I want you to try to guess who it is before I’ll tell you.”

It’s humiliating! It’s galling! Who, in the ages of the world, has been able to make the cut and bow to this arbitrary, capricious Deity? There’s the Big Seven, of course: Enoch, Abraham, Moses, David, Job, the Virgin Mary and Mother Theresa. But were there any more? Among the million millions? Only seven? Perfect.

Is it really so stark a contrast as that? To obey Yahweh no matter what or to be rejected? (Proverbs 3:5-6?) It’s enough to provoke rebellion! And what of all the rest who weren’t Chosen or rebelled when they were? Rejected.

Doesn’t this Yahweh get tired of these ridiculously high standards? What game does he think he’s playing? He had a multitude before him and rejected every last one...and the last possible candidate is somewhere out in the wilderness chasing

sheep? This'll turn out well!

PROGNOSIS: This Is the One!

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : Anointed

The good news is that after seven wonderful but ultimately rejected candidates, there was another provided. The unlikely golden haired boy with the winning smile. The anointed one who could single-handedly win the game. But not by winning it. Winning by losing...and then walking off the field in victory. He built no castles, no empires. He killed no giant in mortal combat. He was, instead, that shepherd, and led sheep to verdant pastures. He was a shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep. He knew his sheep by name...they could hear his voice. He did not come to rule but to serve; not to win but gladly to lay down his life. His bravery did not result in the deaths of his enemies...in love he turned the other cheek. The Son of David was not an elite warrior: he instead forgave the ones who tortured and killed him. Raised from death, He is the One true King.

What does this mean? Yahweh may see the heart, and Yahweh may pass men by, but in the Shepherd King, it is not so. He seeks the lost and restores sight to the blind. He forgives sinners and creates in them clean hearts. Now, when Yahweh looks, he sees the heart of the Anointed One who saved the ungodly; Jesus Christ. And there is no more rejection, nor condemnation. Those who are in the Anointed One are a new creation... and in the Anointed One, there is neither Jew nor Greek, man nor woman, slave nor free. It is the dawning of a new heaven and a new earth, a whole new Paradigm.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis: (Internal Solution) : The Spirit Came upon Him Mightily...

Where the Spirit presides, are there rules or are there choices? Is there freedom for the Christian or only submission to the Path of Yahweh? Can one be in Christ's New Creation and invest

in Marlboro? MacDonaldis? Does the Spirit tell us to pay the taxes that build the bombs? The old is gone, the new has come, but ... now what? Where are our heart's fortunes invested? In whom is our trust? Whom do we look to when the going gets tough? Institutions of government? Concealed weapons? Civil society? A better President? Mammon? The Anointed One? How can this be?

The Spirit moves mightily? Is this true? Doesn't look like it. Where's the proof?

Proof is: The Good News is heard and trusted to this very day...that people trust Jesus Christ...and that their lives are poured out in love for the good of all...doubt it not: the Spirit is moving mightily. Consciences are bound to the Word of God – to Jesus Christ. Attuning hearts to Christ-and inbreathing the gumption to follow-is what the Spirit moves mightily to achieve.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Setting out to Seek out*

Chosen to be cleansed in the living waters, we make like Samuel and set out for a distant place on a very particular mission: To seek out those who believe they've been rejected and passed by. To say to them: "Your God Reigns." And "Fear Not." And "Peace Be With You." And "Neither Do I Condemn You." And "Come Forth." And "Arise, Little Girl." And "Mary." To bring light into darkness.

Saul and his million brothers took matters into their own hands and did what they saw was right. Brothers like Bonhoeffer, like Luther, like Ghandi, like Mandela, who took life's lemons and made lemonade. With as much integrity and prayer as each had in him: each man did what was right in his own eyes. But that still sounds like a recipe for anarchy, Old Testament style. Yet perhaps not. We STILL try to make good choices to attain good outcomes, but now those "optimum outcomes" are transformed. It is not about securing it all for me and mine, not anymore. Now

it is about serving and providing for the least of our brothers and sisters. We finally get to share what we have so that all can taste and see that the Lord is good! We're about lavishly giving, not hoarding, our time, treasure, and talent. What joy!

Our instincts and judgments, wealth and time are not the means of our survival or success in this dim vale: they are the tools with which we gladly reach out and help others. Our survival, you should know, is already assured. For whether we live or we die, we are the Lord's.

What's Samuel up to? We can just imagine the old man chuckling and moving up the road with his staff. He's got news to share: "Even though Saul wasn't good enough, even though I'm not good enough, even though guys who are big and strong and pretty impressive aren't good enough, there is one who is. He's the King! God has chosen him and raised him up to save the people. And that matters."

And that distant place toward which we meander with wayward steps? Our home. The Chooser sees the Shepherd coming, bringing in the stragglers, and opens the gates. Welcome One, welcome all!