

Fourth Sunday in Lent

WITH EYES WIDE OPEN

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Analysis by Ron Starenko

1The 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.

6When 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 mortal 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: Eyes Closed

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Scratching the Surface*

The story of the anointing of David as king, successor to fallen-out-of-favor Saul, is vulnerable to distortion, if we use it merely to come up with a pious lesson, like “don’t judge a book by its cover.” For example, the prophet-judge Samuel checks out seven sons of Jesse, all of whom get a No vote from God; then he encounters son number eight, David, who was “ruddy...[with] beautiful eyes...and handsome” (v. 12), as if, so Samuel might have thought, that were a good enough reason to choose him as king. Never mind that the Lord had previously said, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature...for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (v. 7). One reason, perhaps, why we like to deal with life superficially is that we use outward appearances as a basis for acceptance or rejection about almost everything. When it comes to dealing with ourselves we prefer to stay close to the surface, because we fear what we might find beneath the layers of our defenses, where God looks; so we keep our eyes closed.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Seeing Only What We Want to See*

In fact, we all see what we want to see, trusting our preconceived notions and rationalizations, leaving us as good as blind. Like the Pharisees with respect to Jesus (John 9:16, 24, and 29), we fail to see God beneath surface appearances. When we move through life with impaired sight, without the insight of faith, we are guilty of looking for God where God is not, and vice versa, we fail to see God where God is. After parading all the sons of Jesse before him, even Samuel, his eyes closed, seemed helpless to recognize God's choice.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *We End Up in the Dark*

Ultimately, while we grope in the darkness, our greatest danger is failing to see Jesus, who could be standing in front of our very eyes. When the Pharisees said to Jesus, "We know that this man is a sinner" (John 9:24), they gave greater honor to David or Moses, who, for them, had more appeal—better credentials—than Jesus. Blind, they miss, on another occasion, even David's words, that his son is also his Lord (Matt. 24:42). Failure to see Jesus is to anoint the wrong king as Lord, missing out on the promise and ending up suffering the fate of all sinners, lost in eternal darkness, rejected by God (vv. 7-9), as all of us are undeserving of being chosen, our eyes closed forever.

PROGNOSIS: Eyes Wide Open

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *What God Sees*

Yet, there is a sight, a seeing, that can heal us. The good news is that God, who "looks on the heart" (v. 7), sees not only our darkness, but sees also the light of God's own heart, Jesus, contrary to all expectations, coming among us in the form of a servant, one whom we did not choose, anointed by God alone. It was neither David nor Moses that the prophet Isaiah had in mind

when he wrote, “he had no form or majesty that we should look on him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others, a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised and we held him of no account” (Isa. 53:3). Not at all the kind of credentials we would be looking for in a messiah, who doesn’t appear to be from God (John 9:29), no David in shining armor. Yet, there is Jesus, God hidden in the suffering of the cross, bearing the ugliness of our sin and shame, rejected, enduring our darkness, our deadly blindness of heart, becoming “the light of the world” (John 9:5). That is what God sees, God’s eyes wide open in love for us, anointing Jesus, crowning him King of Kings by raising him in splendor, destroying death forever, to make us as beautiful and whole and alive as Jesus, with eyes wide open.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *What Even the Blind Can See*

The last sign that Jesus does on his way to Jerusalem is the healing of blind Bartimaeus, who cried out on the Jericho road, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47). After Jesus had touched his eyes, he regained his sight and followed him. Even the blind, when their eyes are opened, now seeing with their hearts, live to follow Jesus, as they come out of the shadows with a new kind of sight. “The spirit of the Lord came mightily” (v. 13) on the blind man in the gospel lesson whom Jesus heals, along with his parents, as they receive the gift of sight and faith. They are now willing to face the danger of being excommunicated from the synagogue for seeing and believing that Jesus was the Messiah of God (John 9:22), accepting the risk, rejoicing to walk in the light, no darkness or danger able to separate them from the healing power of the One who was sent from God (John 9:33), their eyes wide open.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *What Sight Can Do*

So, where do we go with all this? Clearly, in the Old Testament lesson God sees us as inadequate, deserving even of being rejected; and yet God still chooses us according to his good and gracious will. Clearly, also, in the gospel lesson God, who is light in Jesus, sees us through our blindness to what we can become, people with eyes wide open to God's healing presence, where we struggle to get beneath the surface to the things that really matter, to "live as children of the light" (Eph. 5:8), as Jesus said, "to do the works of him who sent me while it is day" (John 9:4), to shatter the darkness as we get to do the works of light, loving God and our neighbor, anointing the sick with kindness, laying our hands on the depressed, touching the lonely, blessing even the enemy, so that the whole world, with eyes opened wide, will see Jesus, the Christ, God's anointed.