

The Lord Looks on the Heart

The sermon text for today comes from the Old Testament reading for this week is about the anointing of David, from 2. Samuel chapter 15 verse 34 through chapter 16 verse 13. (read from Bulletin)

(The following text is copied courtesy Vanderbilt Divinity Library)

1 Samuel 15:34 - 16:13

15:34 Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul.

15:35 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.

16:1 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."

16:2 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.'"

16:3 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."

16:4 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?"

16:5 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.

16:6 When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the LORD."

16:7 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."

16:8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one."

16:9 Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one."

16:10 Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these."

16:11 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."

16:12 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."

16:13 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.

One of the many things I first noticed when we started working in the former East Germany was that some of the most brilliant people in the community appeared at first to me like they could possibly be the janitor. It was rare to see men wearing ties or women wearing makeup, and it wasn't uncommon to see men with wild unkempt eyebrows, dirty glasses and smelling of body odor. Then they would open their mouths and the most amazing words would flow out of them. And come to find out – they were Herr or Frau Doctor “So-and-so”.

That was when I realized how dependent I was on judging by appearances. How many times have I heard, “You never get a second chance to make a first impression”? And how many books and magazines focus on how to dress yourself to fame?

Well, I am not alone in judging someone by appearances, Samuel was tempted, too. Samuel was very impressed with the oldest Son, so naturally, he thought at first it would be the eldest son - hierarchy means so much in the history of the faith. And yet, God chose a ruddy-faced, small, young man to be a great King. And David wasn't a really serious guy at first either. He was playing the Lute and swinging his slingshot and probably doing all kinds of things to keep himself preoccupied while he was sitting around for hours on end watching sheep graze. When the time came to make a serious decision God said to the Samuel, ". . . the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

It reminds me of a recent experience while I was unpacking some of my boxes I came across my office box that has been packed away since 1992. I found a small note with a quote on it that I had written from somewhere. I guess I wasn't too concerned at the time about copyrights because I didn't quote who it came from. But it

immediately caused me to sigh a 'sigh of relief' in this new position here. It says, "If I pray to God that all people might be inspired because of me, I would find myself repenting at the door of every house. I would rather pray that my heart be pure toward everybody."

Having a pure heart are words often found in the scriptures, in hymns, and in religious writers. A pure heart is important not only because God *sees* in there, but because God *dwells* there too, and the cleaner that we keep that dwelling place, the easier it is to commune with God. God is so intimately entwined with our souls that there is nothing we can do, or think, or feel, that is a secret.

But so often we live our lives in fear of being caught - caught at being not good enough, not wise enough, not strong enough, not courageous enough - just not enough. So we wear our protective soul garments - not to hide from God, but to hide our weaknesses from each other. The problem is that once we start hiding our souls from each other, we begin to fool *ourselves* into hiding those secrets

from ourselves. And sometimes *we* are the hardest to find within ourselves, when others see right through us.

And the truth is, we aren't enough - NO one is, we all need grace desperately, and yet, in one of the most mysterious elements of faith, *when we are journeying through this life with God we ARE actually doing enough!* We are falling down, picking ourselves up, acting blindly, finding the truth, laughing, living . . . all in full knowledge that there is a living God ready and sharing this all with us.

We need to learn to trust other humans and not to keep secrets from them, because when we don't have to hide our secret weaknesses from others, *we* can see *ourselves* more clearly. And when *we* can see the log in our own souls (that others may see as only a splinter) and *we* are so busy working on getting rid of that, our neighbors are very much aware of our efforts. That is when they see that they can trust us to help them to remove what they see as a log in their souls, (which looks like a splinter to us).

This process of regularly cleaning our soul house, and being ready to help others is what motivated Paul on his mission, and what he was referring to in our Epistle today, “(Christ) died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves . . . we regard no one from a human point of view (as those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart) . . . So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”

Years of soul cleaning and journeying with God creates in us pure hearts – new hearts – new lives – lives that we never dreamed possible! Everything becomes new - like Jesus’ parable that Mark wrote about where the seed would sprout and grow, and the planter doesn’t know how it happens - it changes drastically but does it slowly and secretly.

But (not to sound like an info-mmercial) “but that isn’t all . . . no!” not only is it new, but like the smallest of the seeds – the little mustard seed – becoming the greatest of all scrubs! And it does so for

spiritual reasons as well as physical ones, for the mustard seed was important in many Jewish rituals!

So we here, in little Hyattstown Christian Church, have been hearing from a rather short pastor about little David becoming a great King, and the little mustard seed becoming the greatest of all scrubs! What could this all mean?

Well, first of all, I think we can each come up with our own answer to this. What does the worship experience today mean in our soul-homes? Well, that is very individual and personal. But on a communal level, I will honestly admit that I hope our community will grow in numbers, not because of the boasting rights - which will build our foundation on sand, but because we will be with Paul, and so many millions of Christian leaders throughout history, who have been equipping people to become new in Christ - for Christ - tending his sheep - and for each other.

If our congregation does grow over the years, and will have a healthy foundation, then it will only grow as a result of our – (including and perhaps especially my) personal spiritual growth. I believe it will happen. It will be hidden and secret and we won't know how or why, yet, like the seed that grows mysteriously, we may recognize its progress and play a part in it as it grows.

Amen