

## Samuel and David

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost - Year B

First Reading: 1 Sam (15:34-16:13) Psalm (20)

NT: 2 Cor (5:6-10, 14-17), Mark (4:26-34)

In our Old Testament reading from First Samuel, the Lord says to Samuel, “Fill your horn with oil and be on your way...” (1 Sam 1) This is how the Lord tends to call prophets. God wants obedience, and God wants it now! You will remember, this was how it happened for Jonah, too. And when Elijah sees Elisha in the book of Kings, all he does is throw his cloak over his shoulders to tell Elisha he is to be a prophet of God. In fact, this is the way the Lord often calls us. Remember when Jesus talks to those hard-working fishermen, Simon Peter and Andrew? Jesus just says, “Come, follow me...”

Jesus extends an open-ended invitation to us to follow him. And if you are in this sanctuary at this moment, you may be in the process of answering this call. Yes, when Jesus calls it is something we should rise to at the moment. We should not wait to respond. The disciples, Peter and Andrew, when they are called, simply get out of their boats and go with Jesus. But I notice from my reading that the prophets are not always so quick about it.

Remember Jonah, well he hired a ship and sailed in the other direction from where God was calling him. He was headed for Tarshish when God was calling him to Nineveh. Tarshish was about as far as away as you could get from Nineveh in the civilized world. In our reading, Samuel is none too keen on doing what the Lord tells him either. He is none to

keen on anointing one of the sons of Jesse in Bethlehem to be king!

Samuel makes an excuse. “How can I go?” (v.2), he asks. Because, as he says, “if Saul hears about it, he will kill me.” Seems like a good reason not to want to go. Saul would not be happy to find out that Samuel was going to anoint someone to take his place as king. Kings are known to be protective of their power and position. After all, they are elected for “life”. And normally it is not until their life *ends* that another king is made. This is what is surely going through the mind of Samuel. But all this is beside the point to God. God has already chosen one of the sons of Jesse to be king, and to make it apparent and legitimate in the eyes of Israel, Samuel must anoint this new candidate to be king. (v.1)

Aren't we all a bit like Samuel? Finding excuses not to do God's will. Finding excuses not to be all that God would have us to be? And yet God often finds a way to work through us. We as humans are not perfect. We are all sinners, but God knows that. God chooses to be in relationship with us anyway.

So, in our reading, God calms Samuel's fears and tells him to go to Bethlehem, ostensibly to make a sacrifice to God. And yes, indeed, Samuel is making a sacrifice. He is to give up a bull, and he is sacrificing peace of mind by bravely taking action. God tells him that he will tell Samuel what to do...which is basically to “...anoint the one I indicate.”

So, Samuel does what the Lord tells him. But when he shows up in Bethlehem he is greeted with fear from the elders of the town. (v.4) Now, why do you think they might fear Samuel? Well, Samuel is the Judge of all Israel! He arbitrates

disputes. He is a power to be reckoned with. It would be like you were standing on a street corner at a table selling strawberry shortcake. And a police car slows down near your stand. And the police person, with a squint in her eye and a frown on her face peers at your little stand. What goes through your mind? Do I need a permit for this? Has someone complained about the quality or price of my short cake? Why is this police person looking at me and my stand so intently? Then the car pulls over and with a swagger the police officer walks over. She bends slightly forward peering at your strawberries and then says, "I'll try one of your shortcakes." Then reaches for her purse.

You can imagine what the elders of Bethlehem are thinking. Is Samuel here as judge? Is he after someone in particular? Is he going to lay a judgement on the entire town? They must have been relieved when he told them he came in peace. And they must have felt even better yet when Samuel said he had come to sacrifice a bull to the Lord. (v.5)

Now I think we can imagine this sacrifice to be a kind of communal meal, where the community comes together. There would be a ceremony first and, if the people in Bethlehem had any Presbyterian tendencies, there was pot luck with the blessed beef afterward. Samuel makes a special point of inviting Jesse and his sons because the presence of Jesse is absolutely vital to Samuel's mission from God.

Before the meal is to begin, as people are milling about, Jesse introduces his sons to Samuel, probably in order of their birth. The first one is Eliab. And what a good looking young fellow he is! Samuel thinks, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands

here...” But as soon as the thought enters his mind, he realizes that his judgment in this case is wrong. God tells him, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him.” (v.7) “The Lord does not look at the things people look at.” And what do people look at? As God says, “People look at outward appearance,” but what does the Lord look at? “The Lord looks at the heart.”

Well, then another son is brought before Samuel. This one is Abinadab and is probably the second son. But Samuel, following the Lord’s instruction says, “The Lord has not chosen this one either.” Then Jesse has Shammah pass by, and the Lord rejects this one as well. This episode is starting to look like a beauty pageant!

Pretty soon, seven sons have passed by and Samuel has become perplexed. God was not approving any of these sons of Jesse. They all looked good, but evidently they were not what God was looking for. But just what was it **exactly** that God was looking for in the hearts of these young people? In seeming exasperation Samuel asks Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?” (v.10) as if seven were not enough.

Well, Jesse has to admit that there is one more child. “There is still the youngest.” You can just imagine What Samuel is about to say. “Well then, where is the boy?” for the young man in question would very nearly be a boy at this point in his life. But eager to please, Jesse blurts out, “He is tending the sheep.” But he stands there in indecision about calling the boy because SOMEONE needs to be tending the sheep. Someone needs to take care of the flock, someone needs to be tending to the necessary business of the family.

But Samuel is the one with authority and he says, “Send for him!” (v.11) Yes, go get the lad. And it is here that Samuel may well perceive what it is the Lord is looking for in his anointed. It is not necessarily good looks. It must be virtue. It must be what is in his heart. This young man is sacrificing of himself for others. He is doing his duty. And God can see within him, what we who only see on the surface can only guess at.

And you know, God does this for all of us. God looks past what it is we wear, how we cut our hair, or our manners. All of these aspects we choose and are not born with. They are things we put on for other people. I am not saying these are not important. In fact, they do have something to say to other human beings. Affected appearances send signals. If we wear a ski mask when we walk into a bank are carrying a duffle bag and an AK47, that may say something about who we are and what our immediate intentions are. We are probably making a withdrawal rather than a deposit. If we are polite, it generally signals that we want to be helpful. This is something we can all understand. But an evaluation of appearances does not delve down deep inside of us.

It is only God that can peer into our very souls. God sees the very essence of who we are, which is the very core of our being. And you know what? God loves that purity that is there. God loves that essence.

We know from our reading that at the end of our story God indeed chooses to anoint the youngest. (v.12) Jesse sends for the shepherd of the flock and when he arrives Samuel completes the mission he began. At the beginning of the reading he is told to “Fill his horn with oil...” and that oil is used

for the anointing of the youngest son of Jesse, one of the most famous kings in the history of humankind. It is, of course, King David. As it turns out he is handsome, like his brothers. So, we know looks had nothing to do with it. But he is also the chosen of God.

In a way, we are all like David. God peers into our hearts and sees the very essence of who we are. We know that David was a sinner, his affair with Bathsheba would prove to cause trouble for David for the remainder of his life. We are also sinners, yet God chooses to love us. And out of love for us, God sent Jesus Christ to be our redeemer, our savior. Jesus takes on all of that sin that we have committed. Once and for all he has taken on the punishment for us, so that when God peers into our souls, God sees Christ, who stands in for all humanity. For we know that we are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We understand this by God's Word, and for it give glory to God alone.

In the end of this passage we read that Samuel returns to Ramah, his work in Bethlehem is done. But you know, this is only the beginning of the story. The anointing of David begins a line of kings that will rule forever. We know from the genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew that Jesus was of this line. And it is Jesus that rules the church as the head of the Body of Christ and Jesus who rules our hearts.

Now let us pray together...

Eternal God, whether we will it or not you peer into our hearts. Gracious Lord when you do so, do not look on our sins, but on our faith in you. Nurture within us your Spirit and lead us to love one another and you O Lord, Father, Son and Spirit.