

First Presbyterian Church
1 Sam. 15:34-16:13, “The Calling of David”
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 6/16/2024

How do we live what we believe about God’s grace? It happens through stories.
If I just study theology about grace, I may gain *intellectual* insights,
but when I fail to show up for an appointment or
snap at my kids because I’m too stressed out or
don’t feel like I’m matching up to others around me,
all that theology will stay up in my head.
That’s why spending time with stories of God’s grace is important.
I need stories of grace in order for what I believe about grace
to take root in my life.
Stories of God’s grace toward people like us are what we need for daily life.
And God was gracious to David.

In John Calvin’s commentary on the Psalms,
he says that *David’s life is one that we can hold up like a mirror in which
God sets before us the continual chorus of divine grace.* [REPEAT]

We know more about David’s life than anybody else in the Bible.
David’s name appears more than any other name in the OT
– over 800 times – and another 60 times in the New Testament.

The New Testament writers saw David as a link to the person of Jesus,
and so they often refer to Jesus as the “Son of David.”
Despite his glaring flaws, David was the greatest King of Israel,
while Jesus was the servant King which David could never be.

Even though he lived more than 3,000 years ago,
had an incredibly dramatic life and ended up as one of the most
famous kings in Israel’s history,
I connect personally with David
because he portrayed in such a deeply human way.
In the Bible’s account of his life we find careful attention to God’s presence,
striving to live well, and loving people deeply in difficult situations.
We also find huge amounts of self-indulgence,
difficulty harnessing bodily desires, anger,
and a family life filled with jealousy, strife, and rebellion.
In one way or another, those are things that most of us can relate to.

So I invite you to open your hearts to what God's Spirit might say to you today through the story of how God chose David to be king.

Last week we saw how God acquiesced to Israel's desire to be like other nations and have king to lead them into battle. They got King Saul.

According to Eugene Peterson's summary,

"Saul was not that interested in God.

He was interested in his job as king – including the tool of worship with regard to being king.

He was a good king, but he got it reversed.

He wanted God to serve him, and he loses the kingdom."

Now, Saul will hang onto his rule for many years after this – but not with the blessing and empowerment of God's Spirit.

At a spiritual level, when Saul is rejected, Samuel mourns the loss of God's blessing on the King of Israel.

What would this mean for his own place in national life?

At the same time, this is the major turning point that opens the door for David.

So God tells Samuel to stop mourning and fill up his horn with oil!

There's a new king to be anointed.

"Oh, you scraped your knee? Get back up on your bike, kid!"

Samuel dutifully heads out on this new mission, but

"When he arrived at Bethlehem, [which, a thousand years later, would become the place of Jesus' birth]

the elders of the town trembled when they met him.

They asked, 'Do you come in peace?'"

Why would the town elders be so concerned to see Samuel?

Walter Brueggeman writes that these poor folks were caught in a double bind:

"The elders of Bethlehem are terrified at Samuel's coming.

He is known as a king maker and a king breaker.

Whenever the high officials of the court come to the village, there can only be trouble and risk.

Either Samuel is Saul's man,

come to forage in the unclaimed south,

or he is not Saul's man, which puts them at risk... with Saul."

Samuel navigates the tension with the carefully crafted cover story
that Yahweh gave him to say: “Hey, nothing to worry about, folks,
I’m just here to perform a sacrifice to the Lord!
Jesse - won’t you come?
(And, uh, be sure to bring your entire family.)”

This is how Jesse and each of his sons are brought before Samuel without
knowing his true purpose for being there.

Now, Samuel thought the first son brought out would be an excellent choice.
His name was Eliab. He was an imposing figure, just as Saul was.
So Samuel thinks, “**Surely the Lord’s anointed stands before me!**”

But God tells Samuel he does not look at the things that humans look at
-- even when the human is a prophet like Samuel!
God looks upon the heart.

So the sons of Jesse continue the parade. Seven sons in all pass by. Seven!
One for each day of creation. Surely this is the complete set
of Jesse’s sons for Samuel to choose from,
with Jesse standing there like a proud father on Father’s day. [PAUSE]

Most of us have stood in line to be chosen for something,
or submitted an application to be selected for a job or a program.
It’s an agonizing experience.
In school-yard games, there’s always the kid who’s going to be chosen first.
And there’s always the kid who everybody has just forgotten about.
Wherever it was that I got picked, it was never first.
And I always felt a bit apologetic to the team that picked me,
as if they chose me out of pity.

According to his dad, David wasn’t just the last pick – he wasn’t even on the list!
We’re not so different.
Most fathers and mothers evaluate their kids
through a different lens than God uses.

The standards used by our own parents echo in our minds.
We unconsciously evaluate the children in our lives through
our perception of what our friends and neighbors might think.

How would we parent, grandparent, teach or coach differently
if we started by seeking out the heart of God?

Jesse had a worldly, patriarchal lens.

Both he and Samuel were looking at maturity, strength, intelligence,
accomplishments, ambition, and so on.

They found more than one suitable candidate among the seven older sons,
never even *thinking* about David.

I wonder how many of you or your family members, your close friends
were passed over at some point in time because you didn't look the part?

Maybe you were a woman. Maybe you weren't the right size or shape.

Maybe you were young. Maybe you're part of the LGBTQ community.

Maybe you process things internally rather than externally.

You can come up with any number of other categories
that people have wrongly used for exclusion.

What we see here is that God has always operated on a different standard
than human cultures.

God doesn't look to intellect, strength, beauty, or charisma.

Imagine how stressed-out Samuel was at this point.

He's seen all of Jesse's kids, but none of them are chosen by the Lord!

So he awkwardly asks [gulp], "Do you have any others?"

The answer Jesse gives is not, "Oh, yes, my promising son David!"

No, the words out of Jesse's mouth in v. 11 are,

"There is still the youngest. He's out with the sheep."

These are the words introducing the greatest king in Israel's history:

"There is still the youngest. He's out with the sheep."

Strange sounding words from the world's perspective,

but they are fitting words of introduction

from the perspective of God's upside-down Kingdom.

As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

**"God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—
and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,
so that no one may boast before him."**

It's not that there was nothing to commend David.
He wasn't a blundering fool with no hope in life.
But whatever he had going for him,
he was not chosen *on the basis of his good looks or talents*.
God looked on him, the youngest
and at the time least respected of Jesse's sons,
and saw a person after God's own heart.

In this way, David received God's anointing in a way
which puts him on the same level with all of us.

He was literally the guy in line that everybody forgets about until the end,
who nobody wants on their team, and God chose him first!

How do we change our own perception of ourselves and of others
to be more like God's perception?

1) Search your own heart. Where do you feel you don't belong?
Where do you judge yourself harshly?
Behind those things are your stories, hurts, expectations, and demands.
I don't care who you are or what you have done:
You are deeply loved and deserve compassion. You are.
We all know God is gracious,
but very few of us really believe that God's grace reaches *to me*.

2) Consider someone who wouldn't fit the world's definition of greatness
(or who doesn't meet *you own* definition of greatness!).

This person isn't at the top of an organization, they didn't get all the awards,
they aren't a shining example of strength and achievement,
but... their life demonstrates something of the meekness, humility,
and grace of Jesus. Their life is full of love. They serve others.
Who comes to mind for you?

Spend time with that person, ask them to tell you their story,
share your story with them, and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal
what makes them wonderful in God's eyes.

When we dig into our own story and others stories like we have
with David's story,
we find out that we're not all that different from each other.

David was a king and we're just ordinary people.

But we all want to be seen and loved for who we are.

We're all scared that we don't match up to the expectations of others.

The good news is that God operates differently than our world does.

If we give ourselves time to breath, time to contemplate God's love,

time to unwind the messed up perceptions that we build up over the years,

God will align our hearts in a new way.

Our Creator calls, includes and uses misfit outsiders,

ordinary people with nothing special to offer,

whose hearts are attuned to the

deep, abiding, and unbelievably patient

Spiritual rhythms of the universe.