

1 Samuel 16:1-13

David's anointing in today's story follows a traditional biblical storyline in which God shows unexpected favour for a younger sibling, singling out an unlikely candidate.

The passage looks backward to what has already happened: The failures of the judges and the encroaching Philistines set the conditions for the installation of a monarchy over the tribes of Israel. So when the people of Israel ask for a king, Samuel warns them about the rule of kings and their rites. They will live as they did under the Pharaohs. They wouldn't listen to Samuel, so he anoints Saul, who appears at first to exhibit some leadership qualities. As the first king over the nation, Saul perfectly fits the prototypical characteristics of an ancient Near Eastern ruler. He was a military leader, and enjoyed wide populist support. Most significantly, before his rise, Saul was humble in spirit.

But Saul's humility soon gives way to disobedience, and he consequently loses his favour with God. And almost immediately his authority is undermined by a string of clashes with both Samuel and God. His chief offence is disobeying God during clashes with the Amalekites. Instead of just eliminating the Amalekites, Saul's men plundered, taking the best fatted sheep and goats. Then they ate the meat without draining them of blood. Saul's exact offence is unclear. Latitude for decisions and grace for mistakes are not given to Saul as he is decisively rejected by God.

His downward slide continues until his death at the end of First Samuel.

So, God speaks to Samuel and tells him that God's favour is withdrawn from Saul. Previously, Samuel had rejected Saul's confession of sin and his pleading to be restored. Now, God is sending Samuel to anoint another king. It is easy to condemn Saul and move on to David. Yet, the Saul situation remains unresolved. It is not tidy, and we are reminded that, essentially, the world is not a tidy place and God cannot repair everything that we have broken.

One of the primary messages of this story is that God is (yet again) providing for the welfare of the people, just as God had previously provided deliverance from Pharaoh; manna and water; the law in the wilderness; a land during the settlement; and guidance and leadership during the period of the judges.

God says to Samuel: "Find a man named Jesse who lives there, for I have selected one of his sons to be my king." God was again venturing out ahead of the people, authoring the scroll of their story before it had yet been unrolled.

We may not sense what God is doing in our midst or how God is leading us. Even Samuel did not know what God was doing. This story affirms that God's "providence" operates beyond the spectrum in which our sight operates.

God's eye here is on the flock and not just the individual sparrow. In our age we tend to individualize so many of the messages of the Bible. Here, it is important to note that it is **the community of faith** that is under God's care. Neither Saul nor David's older brothers might have understood the way in which God was providing for Israel as a good way, but God's eyes were on the people as a whole and not simply the individuals.

Samuel was still grieving Saul's failure as king. But God is ready to move on and has located the next king in Bethlehem among Jesse's sons. But Samuel is not only sad, he's worried: a rival to the throne will certainly cause political problems and so God provides him with a clever cover-story to get him safely to Bethlehem. Samuel isn't the only one that's concerned: the city elders shake with fear when this prophet shows up at their door.

The level of fear in the nation is heightened under the state of war with the Philistines, and exemplified by the trembling city elders who instantly interrogate Samuel about his intentions. God instructs Samuel to invite Jesse's family to a sacrificial meal, without telling Jesse anything about the reasons for the meal.

Samuel declares a sacrifice to God, an interaction that turns the normal custom upside down. The people of the town are the ones who are supposed to offer hospitality to the stranger.

Yet it is this stranger, the one who had never visited Bethlehem before, who is inviting the town to worship. After fears subside for all parties, Samuel begins his search for the new king based on the same expectations he had with his previous anointing. After all, Saul's physical stature was one of the distinctive attributes of the handsome first king who "stood head and shoulders above everyone else." While Samuel looks for a king based on the model of physical stature and poise, God instructs him to suspend human logic and trust in Divine guidance.

Jesse brought each of his first seven sons before Samuel to see which son would be anointed as king. God doesn't see things the way we see them. People judge by outward appearance, but God looks at the heart." As each successive son passes before Samuel, one could imagine the prophet's disappointment. He turns to Jesse, perhaps in bewilderment, and asks whether all of his sons were present. There was one more son, but he was the youngest and of such little account that Jesse had left him out in the field tending the sheep. Reluctantly, Jesse answers, "There is still the youngest, but he's out in the fields watching the sheep and goats." It appears that Samuel's inspection is now following the heart of God. He does not see with human eyes, but in congruence with God, he is looking at the heart.

God's choice of the youngest son is theologically significant. In addition to being another of the "reversals" introduced in Hannah's song which we heard last week, this counterintuitive move is an Old Testament

staple. Seth over Cain (who had murdered Abel), Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Ephraim over Manasseh, Moses over Aaron, and Solomon over Adonijah, are just a few of the most important instances of younger sons whom God chooses to use over older brothers. When this is coupled with the insight that God uses what is weak, and whose power is made perfect in weakness, the connections to Jesus, "the anointed one," become clearer.

At the request of Samuel, the youngest finally comes. When Jesse presents his youngest son, who, still a "boy," was naturally small in stature. So the great King David comes in through the back door. That's not to say he doesn't make an impression. As soon as he walks in, alarm bells go off in Samuel's head. Ding ding ding! That's the one! That's my anointed! His physical appearance is striking. We're told he's ruddy. We're also told he's handsome. Sure, he's not broad-shouldered and square jawed like his older brothers, but the ingredients are there. He'll grow up to be a real looker. Kings will envy him and princesses will swoon.

Samuel realizes that this youngest son, David, is the one anointed by God. Samuel responds obediently to God's voice, ceremoniously anointing David's head with oil in front of some rather perplexed brothers. "And the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David from that day on."

And then we're told David has beautiful eyes. Beautiful eyes. The Hebrew can mean a lot of things. It can mean exactly what we think it means. Maybe he had dreamy eyes — piercing brown you could just get lost in. But it could also mean he had an eye for beauty. This is certainly true and will get him in trouble. Years later, in the springtime when the kings went off to war and David was alone on his roof, surveying his kingdom, and he spots a beautiful young woman bathing alone in her yard. A wandering eye for beauty?

But maybe he also sees the beauty in the world around him. He has a beautiful way of seeing. After all, he's a poet, the author of many psalms. When he scans the horizon he doesn't just see rolling hills, he sees mountains skipping like rams. When he makes his daily trek through the pastures, he sees, in his sheep, trusting servants of a shepherding Lord. At night before bed, he sees the heavens, the work of God's hands, the moon and the stars and says, "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You have made us lower than the angels..."

In David, the rest of the world sees a scrawny prepubescent teen who didn't merit consideration, but God sees a man after his own heart. God looks at David and sees a thousand futures arrayed before him: some triumphant, some tragic, most a glorious mixture of the two. He sees every flaw and every glimpse of promise. He sees the whole David. Every possible David. And his verdict is love.

David may have come to us through the back door but in God's way of seeing, he was always the one

That was certainly true of Jesus as well. Jesus looked at people and saw their hearts; he saw their potential; he saw the budding disciples, waiting to be. He looked at a despised tax collector sitting at his booth and saw a future Gospel writer. He looked at an illiterate fisherman and saw the leader of a movement. He looked at a sinful young woman tormented by demons and saw an evangelist. **Jesus had beautiful eyes.**

And he has beautiful eyes that transform all who manage to see themselves in the mirror of his gaze. They let loose the possibility that each of us can be who we were created to be. To see ourselves through the eyes of Jesus is to see the beautiful image of God within and know why he was willing to die just to rescue it.

Yes. Jesus has beautiful eyes. Piercing eyes you could lose yourself in. He sees every flaw and every glimpse of promise. He sees the whole you. Every possible you. And his verdict is love. And that is good news to all of us sinners who come into his Kingdom through the back door, tracking mud as we go.

God tells Samuel, "The LORD does not see as mortals see, for they look at the outward appearance but the LORD looks at the heart."

God too, has beautiful eyes. It is probably human nature to reduce our large world to our country, city, or even our own neighbourhood. We can become so entrenched in our place that we forget about others. We need to be open to a call that includes people from the places we can barely name. We are not the centre of God's universe.

Now both Saul and Jesse's oldest are rejected. Both are rejected as a candidate for kingship but are not removed from God's favour. Any call is God's alone and rejection from one position does not disqualify one from other pursuits in the kingdom. This brief narrative drama – beautiful in its use of irony, suspense, and reversal of expectations – plays upon the contrast between seeing and hearing. The problem is that Samuel is relying on his human sense of vision, which will not do for the work of God. Samuel's job was not so much to see as to listen: "you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." The message is rather clear. When dealing with matters of God's actions and will, human sight is an inadequate tool. The human sense of hearing – if we are listening to God – is preferable to seeing.

This dimension of the passage rings out loudly in our cultural context. We rely for almost everything on our sight, but it often proves untrustworthy. Advertisers know that the quickest way to get their fingers into our wallets is through our eyes – by bombarding us with images of sexuality and excess.

Do we really think that wearing the same perfume, lipstick, or jeans as the gorgeous model in a commercial will make us more attractive and successful? Apparently, since we do buy the products, the cars, the hamburgers, and the light beer.

At the same time as Saul's story lurches to its tragic end, David's story unfolds with what seems at first to be naïve zeal, and soon becomes mixed with crafty and even morally objectionable behaviours. Unlike Saul, David is gifted with favour by nearly all who meet him, including Saul's own family members. He is pressed into Saul's service, living at the palace, and even when forced to flee he escapes with several hundred supporters.

Biblical narrative rarely reveals the inner thoughts of characters. So when looking at this story from the perspective of Samuel, we are left with many questions. How does the prophet face the disappointments of his career? Even after he successfully led the Israelites against the Philistines, the people came to ask him for a king, adding that his sons, who had been appointed judges, were as corrupt as Eli's sons we read about last week. After God reassures Samuel that the Israelites rejection is a rejection of God, Samuel anoints Saul as king over Israel, only to have his protégé fail at almost every turn.

Yet, in spite of Samuel's grief and failings, the prophet remains open to God's word and to new possibilities.

While this may not provide a comforting "central Bible truth," it does offer a realistic picture of the human condition and of the ways in which we might deal with disappointment. While we may often feel the grief, remorse, and guilt of past failings – real or imagined – God does not condemn us for them. Rather, God does provide God's servants - that is, you and me - with guidance and new possibilities even when we may not see them.

God's call does not mean that we as humans are perfected. We can and will sin, sometimes in gigantic ways. Without God's forgiveness and restoration, our call from God and even our very lives are doomed. The way First Samuel speaks of David is designed to teach us just that lesson.

When we give our heart to God he can cleanse us, save us, and strengthen us. The heart is where God does God's best work. Whatever troubles your heart, come to God. A well-known theologian wrote, "Don't ever hesitate to take to [God] whatever is on your heart. He already knows it anyway, but He doesn't want you to bear its pain or celebrate its joy alone.

Amen.

WE PRAY FOR OTHERS OCTOBER 19, 2025

God of mercy and healing, you who hears the cries of those in need receive these petitions of your people that all who are troubled may know peace, comfort, and courage.

Anointing God, send your spirit upon your church and its leaders that we may better live out and proclaim your grace and mercy for all the earth. We hold in our prayers; Hills of Peace Lutheran in Kamloops, Redeemer Lutheran in Vancouver - Rev. Katrina Vigen. We pray for Pope Leo XIV; ELCIC Bishop Larry Kochendorfer, ELCA Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry, Bishop Kathy, Bishop Anna, Anglican Primate Shane Parker, Bishops and congregations of the Moravian Worldwide church, Bishop Imad Hadda and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, our sister congregation San Juan Camino d'Esperanza and Pastor Ana Maria Jara, and Holy Trinity Lutheran in Port Angeles. We pray that you would bless the ministries of all deacons, pastors, lay leaders, musicians and volunteers.

Shepherding God, as the seasons change and nature here in the northern hemisphere prepares for winter slumber provide the sustenance it needs for the coming months of rest.

Appointing God, make our leaders mindful of your power and presence in the world that they might serve with humility and justice for the well-being and betterment of all.

Naming God, ground us in our identities as your blessed and beloved children that our lives may reflect your peace and grace. May the beautiful diversity of all peoples created in your image remind us of the multiplicity of ways we can each experience you. Help us as we seek to find you, to look to others, even those who look different than we do, who live differently, who love differently, and who believe differently.

We grieve that violence and war end too many lives and scar your beloved creation too often. So, we pray for war-torn nations all over the world and pray with hope for the places where cease fires are possible; that a permanent cease fire may be agreed upon. We pray with hope for the success of the peace process between Israel and Palestine. We pray for humanitarian aid to be available to fill empty stomachs and to begin the arduous work ahead of rebuilding communities and providing safe homes; for the safety of the remaining hostages being returned to their families; for the bodies of hostages

to be respectfully cared for. We lift up Ukraine and Russia and pray that the loss of innocent lives ends. We pray for the healing of the distrust born out of all the times over these centuries when promises of peace have been broken.

We pray for the thousands who are still missing or displaced from communities now underwater in Alaska after a deadly typhoon hit on Monday. We pray for Madagascar, where youth-led anti-government protests demanding better government, more opportunities, and an answer to alleviate the extreme poverty the country faces have led to a military rebellion. We pray that the many thousands who gathered in numerous nonviolent protests in the US that their voices would be heard as a plea for a better future, where rights and freedoms would be upheld for all citizens. So, we pray for the creation of new systems that will better care for the people and lead to a more promising future for the youth and future generations of all nations.

Healing God, be with all who are ill or suffering this day. We pray that they might know the power of your healing love.

Today we remember all the women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer, those undergoing treatments, and those who have successfully beat their cancer. We pray that cancer researchers find a cure and better treatments as we acknowledge October as Breast Treatment Awareness month.

Living God, you know the prayers within each and every heart. May they be heard and answered according to your will and purposes. And, as we await an answer, may we become the answer. May we experience you, O God, as living, breathing, and at work in the world and within us, each and every moment, until You are able to bring about your reign here on Earth.

Restoring God, keep us firm in our faith and trusting in your eternal promises that we might one day join with all the saints in singing praises of your deliverance.

Gathered together, we pray as one family, as Jesus taught us:

Our Father ...