

March 19, 2023

1 Samuel 16:1-13

“Reading the Classics: On Not Getting What You Want”

So, let me ask you...*do you always get what you want?* If you answer “yes” I am going to ask you what planet you are living on. And yet, humans seem to be shocked – shocked I say to find disappointment in life. Like the inspector closing down “Ricks American Café” in Casablanca for allowing gambling with his left hand while accepting his winnings with his right. Our protests feel thin as we rebel against normal life. It is kind of encouraging then to find that *one of the great prophets and servant of God in days gone by – Samuel* – had this experience. The next time we are struggling with disappointment, ***let’s be encouraged*** to hang in there because it is not a unique life experience – and ***it is not*** a sign we are out of connection with God.

You probably don’t remember the first line of our reading today. We are always in such a hurry to move along to hear the rest of the story that we give early verses short shrift as we hear them. “*The LORD said to Samuel, ‘How long will you grieve over Saul?’*” We are to infer here that Samuel – the great prophet of God – is pouting. Who hasn’t? It is actually kind of fun to watch children openly pout because they don’t know yet they aren’t supposed to. I bet Samuel hid it well too – but God saw. God always sees. ***We might as well be honest with ourselves because nothing is hidden from God.***

So how can we benefit from Samuel’s experience and learn to move into something more redemptive than complaining that things aren’t fair and that life owes us? The first part I think is pretty easy...we make mistakes. I can do that! Samuel’s anointing of Saul as king can hardly be characterized as anything other than a mistake. Granted – he really wasn’t for it and the people wanted it so God said they could have a king. But it wasn’t very far down the road when they realized the king they hoped would take care of them was first and foremost interested in taking care of himself.

Be of good courage – mistakes happen – ***and if we will stop grieving over them and there can be a lot of progress made in their wake.*** In the most painful days of our past – can we practice the discipline of looking for what there is to ***learn about ourselves and life*** rather than rehearsing and nursing our wounds? How long will you grieve over Saul? Sometimes it is time to put on our big boy and big girl pants – learn from pain and move into the future.

And how do we move into the future? **By listening**...by listening and following. Samuel listens to God and does what he knows God wants even when he isn't quite ready to embrace God's future. God seems to know that when he tells Samuel, *you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you*. God is not leaving anything to chance.

And it is a good thing too – because having anointed someone God is now displeased with who was tall, striking and impressive – Samuel is sure he should anoint a tall, striking and impressive brother as well. Let's do better. **Let's learn by painful experience that rushing to fill the gap with what is familiar can lead to repeated mistakes.** Samuel's mistake is easy for us to make as well...to imagine *outward appearance necessarily reflects inward reality*. We live a culture preoccupied with outward appearance – this passage is a direct challenge to that tendency. God's interface with us is **deeply rooted in what scripture calls "heart."**

When we say heart, we are often referring to emotion. But in this passage **heart refers to the combined parts of our nature that make up our character.** Character which is revealed in our actions and not in our appearance. Let's not, as the old commercial said, "Hate Eliab because he is beautiful." Let's just know it isn't all there is. The crucial factor is not that David earned the right to be king – but that God chose him. *God chose the runt of the litter to do great things*. It is something God has a habit of doing.

And finally, if we are going to learn from our disappointments and get over pouting that we can't always get what we want – **we must keep going**. Imagine Samuel getting to the last son – having rejected them all – and wondering, *did I miss God's chosen?* He keeps focused on his call from God and asks, **"Are all your sons here?"** Things rarely fall effortlessly into place, and we have to hang in there with the call of God – even when we aren't sure what to make of it.

There may be no better words for us to take with us as we leave Samuel behind today than the words of the coach of the Washington Senators from the play and movie, "Damn Yankees." (Play Clip – "You Gotta Have Heart")

Samuel is faulted by God for finding what is compelling on the outside. Heart is not the center of emotions in the passage but the center of a person's being: emotion, intelligence, discernment, wisdom, commitment, character, any piece of the puzzle which is us you can think of.

The story is told that outside isn't the crucial matter – but then they go back to describing David in positive terms...can't you hear him say, "Don't hate me because I'm beautiful." Maybe not – but it feels out of place.

The heart of the narrative isn't really about David – it is about Samuel's complicated relationship with God. He is a powerful holy man who nonetheless must overcome some of his own feelings to do as God wants.

David is crucial for the larger narrative of the book – but in this moment Samuel is struggling with God over David's place in the plan.

How do we learn?

We make mistakes – like anointing Saul

We listen – even when it is inconvenient – like being told to anoint a new king while the old one – you anointed – lives.

We learn, sometimes by painful experience, that outward appearance is no match for character.

We stay at it – "Are all of your sons here?"

The word translated as youngest could also be translated as "the least"  
How many times have we felt as if we are "the least of these?" God is always watching – and God chooses on a different basis than people do.

The sons who "should" have been chosen – who have status and stature are passed over by God. Divine Prerogative is present.

God works in spite of our wanting –

Rohr says this is true of Naaman – Grace came to him in spite of himself

Samuel wants a particular kind of king which is of no use to God

- An inspiring presentation means he would be a good King
- What is Familiar to us – handsome – strong leader
- Avoiding what we don't trust – youngest brother

Samuel starts out not wanting Saul to be anointed king – and now doesn't want to anoint someone else. In neither case did Samuel get what he wanted.

There is still no doubt that he is God's prophet – why the grief and fear?

What is the contrast between eyes and heart...outside and inside? Or appearance/quick reaction verses thought and pondering?

Turns out David is listed as handsome too – it turns out not to be a matter of looks but of who God has chosen.

Culturally the Deck is stacked towards older brothers – but God has a penchant for choosing the younger...is that because younger siblings are better? Or is that because God will not be painted into the corner of social custom?

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."

<sup>2</sup> 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.'

<sup>3</sup> 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." <sup>4</sup> 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?" <sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely his anointed is now before the LORD." <sup>7</sup> 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.”<sup>8</sup> Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.”<sup>9</sup> Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.”<sup>10</sup> Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen any of these.”<sup>11</sup> 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.”<sup>12</sup> 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.”<sup>13</sup> 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.