

The times I've read this story, I've found myself feeling sorry for Samuel. He has limits and yet, sometimes, we forget that the people in the Bible are also human. Samuel is constantly called on by God to help further God's kingdom. Since he was a boy living with the priest, Eli, God has given great responsibility to Samuel. "Here I am!" was Samuel's first high-pitched reply to God's voice, yet at the time, Samuel did not yet know the word of God when he first heard from God (1 Sam 3:7).

Samuel was then instructed by Eli to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam 3:9) whenever he heard God calling out to him. And ever since that time in his childhood, God has given Samuel the gifts of judgment and prophecy. Talk about a huge responsibility? Can you imagine the risks associated with being a prophet? Maybe some of you can? Samuel is the one who a few chapters before today's text gives his farewell, retirement speech to the people of Israel letting them know that his job is done. Samuel had done his duty. He had found a king for the people, Saul, and Samuel had officially entered into retirement. So he thought...but God, once again, had other plans for Samuel, even in retirement. So be aware those of you in retirement!

As it turns out, Saul was not working out as the king of Israel, to say the least. A little before our verses for today, scripture reveals that God was not pleased with Saul as king. Saul had not kept the promises that the Lord had commanded of him. He turned his back on God. Samuel knew that Saul would no longer be king as *the Lord sought out a man after his own heart* (1 Sam 13:14). Yet, Samuel did not know who that man would be but God did. That's where we pick up in today's OT scripture.

Before turning to God's word, let us pray. **PRAY. READ. 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13.**

Upon reading this story, I find it interesting that Samuel after all these years of knowing what kind of people God chooses for various jobs still has some confusion as to whom God has chosen for the new king of Israel. While he's still grieving about Saul no longer being king, God tells Samuel to come out of retirement and mourning and begin his next assignment- anointing the new king of Israel. Samuel knows this because God tells him to *fill his horn with oil*. (1 Sam 16: 1). The horn and oil were also used by Samuel to anoint Saul as king. People know something is up when a prophet arrives in town. So to further protect Samuel, God gives him a good excuse to give the city elders who were shaking in fear as to why he is in town- "I have come to make a sacrifice to the Lord." Having arrived in Bethlehem and after giving his good excuse to be there, Samuel finds Jesse and his sons and begins the interview process for the new king (yet it's not really an interview as God has already decided). We aren't told how Samuel did it. Although, one could imagine how he lined up Jesse's sons at the farm one by one, sizing them up or maybe he had them come in one at a time so that he could get a better look at them, establishing without a doubt who would be king? Again, we don't know. What we do know though is that Samuel assumed that his eyes and his past knowledge would tell him who would serve God and Israel in this way. But Samuel was mistaken. The first son, Eliab, comes by and Samuel just knows that he is the one. He is tall and good-looking; therefore, he had to be the one! Surely this

is the one (said with confidence) and then (said with less confidence)...right, God? But God answers Samuel- after his assumption with Eliab- with these instructions for continuing the search and thoughts on Eliab. *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* (1 Sam 16:7). And so...the search for the new king goes on. Son after son, brother after brother, Samuel dismisses them all, as the Lord had chosen none of them for king...until there appeared to be no more of Jesse's sons to interview. How can this be?

Samuel asks Jesse, *Is that all of your boys* (v. 11)? The original assumption may have been that the seven sons represented were, indeed, all of Jesse's sons, but Samuel asked a great, unassuming question. To this Jesse replied that there was one other son, an eighth, but he was the youngest- the runt- and he was keeping the sheep. Someone's got to do it, right? Everyone else was busy being shown off by their father. This reminds me of a male version of Cinderella. Or it almost has a reality show feel to it, doesn't it? I wonder which American Idol judge Samuel would be most like? Maybe that's why God said what he did to Samuel? Samuel needed a reality check. He needed a reminder. Notice all the seeing and hearing that takes place in today's story. We're supposed to listen for God but instead we look for God and because we look for God with our human eyes, we don't recognize God's work or what God sees in people's hearts. God has to tell Samuel, "That's the one. Go anoint him" (v. 12) because Samuel was looking with

his eyes. Whenever we look at someone, we may see something that is not true or unfair based on how someone looks or their skin color or their wallet or their gender or their sexuality or their age or you name it. Some of you may think, "Yea, preacher! That's what people do to me all the time!" But I ask you...how do you also look with your eyes and size up others unfairly instead of getting to know their hearts?

Isn't it interesting how we, as humans, tend to put so much into outward appearances? Exuding confidence is one thing but basing someone's skills on their appearance alone is another. I was reminded of an old issue of *The Week* and under their section called, "Good week for, it reported that it was a good week for *getting rid of those worry lines thanks to a Virginia clinic offering free Botox injections to the unemployed. 'You're more likely to be perceived in a better light if you look good,' explained first-in-line patient Benita Jenkins (p. 8, Vol. 9, Issue 417).* People are unemployed and they're getting Botox injections so that they appear as if they aren't worrying or as if they're younger because they assume (and usually correctly) that the interviewer looks at the outward appearance for a job qualification more than looking at the heart/passion/intellect/courage of a person. This qualification of "heart" is almost unheard of in today's world. This can be the sad reality of our world. The irony is that this story reveals that David was the clear choice for the king because he was a shepherd, which in the Ancient Near East is the primary metaphor for king. Also, it's ironic that we're told that David is good looking and yet he didn't make his father's original line-up. We, like Samuel and Jesse, often overlook the one who

has the heart for the position. We often base our decisions too quickly and without consulting God. We overlook these folks by not being in prayer- in communication with God. We overlook them by judging them by their outward appearance and not by looking on their heart. We overlook them by assuming that their age and level of experience/inexperience always matters in a given situation. This can go both ways. Now a days many people who've had much experience in the workplace are competing with college graduates who will work for less pay. And some of the young folks are not hired due to their inexperience. And then I have to confess at how I have been guilty of this mentality- you know, the old adage- "Don't judge a book by its' cover."

As a campus minister, I received many emails from churches asking for college students to serve as youth directors. During my second year at Vanderbilt, I received such an email and a phone call from a church. I racked my brain thinking of who I thought was gifted in the areas of youth ministry. I called the three or so students I could think of who fit this description and none of them wanted to do the job. As a last resort, I decided to post the job announcement in our weekly email. That day I received a phone call from a student asking me about this opportunity to serve in a local church. I'm embarrassed to admit this, but I almost discouraged him from contacting the church. I didn't think he had the right look of a youth director. He interviewed anyway and got the position. Boy, was I ever wrong? Thanks be to God that God had let this student know that he was being called to work with the youth because I

had no clue. I was looking with my human eyes instead of listening to God. Were it up to me, I would have never told him of this opportunity. He served and thrived in this church for two and a half years. Inside this stereotypical good-looking frat boy was a heart for young people. I didn't know his heart. I wouldn't have thought to take the time to look there, but God did and does. After all, who I am to say who God has chosen? Who are we to say?

When I was in Africa ten years ago, one of the churches where we stopped to worship had a very memorable woman. Her name was Minus. Minus was born with a debilitating disease that took away the use of her legs. Living in a small village, Minus has no access to transportation because like everyone else, she couldn't use her feet to walk from here to there. Some folks who had come from a church in the States a few years before raised money to get Minus a custom bike that she could operate with her hands. This bike meant that Minus could move to another village and go to school. She had just begun school, and she was in her 20s. As we all gathered inside the thatched roof church to worship, I looked around to see who was going to lead us in worship. Before I could identify anyone, Minus crawled from her concrete pew, dragging her legs behind her, down the dirt aisle and made her way to the front of the church. Unbeknownst to us, Minus not only had a heart for God, but she also had a God-given gift - she could lead music and play the drums and guitar. And my goodness, could she sing. Minus was filled with the Holy Spirit.

The same God who called David, despite the odds against him, is always looking at one's heart. "David was chosen and anointed. Chosen not for what anybody saw in him- not his father, his brothers, not even Samuel- but because of what God saw in him" (Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over A Wall*, p. 17). And as many of you know, it was from David's lineage, that Jesus, the Messiah, was born. Scripture tells us that the Lord's spirit came over David from his anointing forward. May God's Spirit continue to come over us so that we may be anointed to see as God sees- into the heart. **Amen.**