

## *Seeing the Children*

October 22, 2017

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This morning's scripture comes from 1 Samuel 16, when David, the boy shepherd, is anointed king.

When we last met the Israelites, they were wandering in the desert. They stayed there 40 years, and led by God, they practiced what it meant to be a covenant people.

And then they crossed over into the land God promised them.

But the tribes of Israel did not live in a bubble – others occupied the land, so battles ensued – bloody and violent. This rag-tag group of Israelites fought, conquered and divided the land, and the tribes grew. Becoming a new nation is a challenge! While the people of Israel acknowledged that God was the true king, it became clear that a human leader was needed -- a king close to the heart of God. One who would rule justly and bring peace.

God's prophet Samuel anointed Saul the first king of Israel. But God rejected Saul for not listening to God and for disobedience. And so Samuel is told to anoint a new king – one whom God will select. Not only is Samuel grieving, because he loves Saul, but he's afraid too...this is treason after all.

And this is where we pick up the story...

1 Samuel 16:1-13

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." (skip to vs. 6)

When Jesse and his sons came, he (Samuel) looked on Eliab (the oldest of the sons) and thought, "Surely the Lord's 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.

The Word of the Lord – Thanks be to God.

Human beings look at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.

The central drama in the text we just read is all about right seeing. Samuel is sent to anoint a new king, and while he, the human, looks upon Jesse’s sons, it is God who truly sees David.

When we look at something, we gaze upon it with our eyes and acknowledge its presence, but when we really see something, it’s less about our eyes and more about our hearts -- we listen carefully, encourage liberally, and seek to understand.

God chooses David, though he was just a child – or as one translation I read said, the “runt”. God sees the potential within him that others do not. And fully known by God, David thrives. Did any of you notice that, unlike Jesse’s other sons, David isn’t named until he is anointed.

God sees us, all of us, our potential, our limitations, our humanness. God listens to our cries and fears, our hopes and dreams, and calls us beloved.

As followers of Jesus, we, too, are called to see all God’s children. To nurture the wisdom within them. To walk with them as they practice, stumble and succeed at life. This is our sacred trust and our future.

Because it is Children's Sabbath and because it is Stewardship season, I want to share a few stories about how your faithful and proportional giving is inspiring us to deeper faith – seeing with our hearts is powerful stuff!

We see children in Bloomington who need food, and we fill backpacks for the Sheridan Story. We see young people who face homelessness, and house Oasis in our building. We see students who need a companion and we tutor children in our school district. We see the girls in Pakistan, we helped build classrooms to close the gender gap and build a brighter future. In Syria, we see children who have only known war and support the church.

Who else might God be calling us to see?

Last week, at the Presbyterian Mission Fair, Bill and I attended a workshop put on by Wayzata Community Church. They hold a Sunday worship service each week for families with people with disabilities of various types, many of whom have Autism spectrum disorder. We learned that they do this because there is a big need in the community because families with children who have neurological challenges often do not feel welcome at church because their children may cause disruption. We are praying to remain open to how the Spirit might lead us into a new ministry of inclusion with families of children with autism and other neurological challenges.

And what of our children already here at Oak Grove?

Based on my talks with students, we know that they many are stressed and they often do not know how to approach their concerns with an adult. They long for honest talks about mental health issues.

Research shows that having a few adults (aside from parents) in caring, trusting relationships with children and youth fosters healthy emotional and spiritual growth. We try to be very intentional about this at Oak Grove.

Because of your faithful giving, we have staff and volunteers who are well trained, faith-filled and are committed to holding sacred space for our young people feel safe, to have honest conversations, to feel supported and loved. Last week, Bill said that one reason to give is to build up the kingdom of God. I want to close by sharing with you three stories of where I've glimpsed the kingdom just this fall...

Jim Koon and Judy Acker work with the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders on Wednesday nights. This duo has created space where our young people feel comfortable sharing their

fears – and they are real. Fears of war, of our leaders in Washington. Judy and Jim do not dismiss these feelings, but offer the gift of presence, the assurance that they, we and God are with them. Jim and Judy recognize that we live in a challenging world, and thus, the curriculum offers the kids to work on silly challenges each week. At first, these fun riddles seem impossible, but the children learn that with collaboration and imagination the puzzles can be solved. (pop can demonstration) The point of this is to help the kids become aware that the world is full of seemingly insurmountable challenges, but that they have within them the ability to face those challenges.

Judy Cooper and Brandon McKinnon lead our children's choir on Wednesdays. When it was clear that Judy Cooper's mom, Gaella, was close to death, Judy was not at children's choir and the children asked for her. When I let the kids know about Judy's mom, one child asked if we could have a moment of silence to pray for Judy and her mom. You could have heard a pin drop. Children innately understand spirituality and have a natural sense of the numinous.

Finally, on World Communion Sunday, between our services, children, youth, and adults worked together in the kitchen and social hall to provide a breakfast to raise funds for CROP. Oh, you should have seen the kitchen – child and adult, each with job, working together toward a common goal, growing in friendship, serving, surrounded by a community of love and care. Surely, it was a foretaste of the coming time when all will live together in harmony.

On this Children's Sabbath, I thank you for your commitment to all God's children. Let us pledge to work and pray until all children are seen, are safe and know themselves to be God's beloved. AMEN