

I Samuel 15:34-16:13
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This summer we will look at David, a person who was held up by God's people as their ideal.

This was a man who made terrible mistakes, and who paid for them with tears and blood.

Yet--through it all--the scripture continues to call him a “man after God's heart.”

Why did God use a man with such obvious flaws? And, what do these stories mean for us?

This first passage today introduces us to David. Israel already has a king, a tall powerful man named Saul, but Saul has not followed what God or the prophet Samuel have commanded. And we learn through Samuel that God has a new king in mind.

Read I Samuel 15:34-16:13

In the ancient days of Israel, when a new king was chosen or when he was about to take the throne, the prophet or priest would anoint him with oil. That means that the prophet would take a horn of oil and pour it in a circle on the man's head so it would run down over his face and down his neck and shoulders. It was a way in the ancient world of setting someone or something apart for divine use. It meant that person or thing was now special and ready to be used by God. We still give nod to this ancient practice when we anoint one's head with oil at baptism. We say that the oil now marks that we belong to God. But to become the leader of our nation, a president must be inaugurated.

Still, in ancient times in Israel, the king was not officially king until he was anointed. In fact this was so important that the king was often referred to as the “anointed one.” In Hebrew that word--meaning anointed one--is Messiah. In Greek, it is Christ.

In fact, long after David's death, long after the line of kings die out in Israel, about 587 BC the people expected God to send them someone like David who would make Israel great again, they expected God to send them a new anointed one, a Messiah. And so when Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the crowd greets him as the Son of David.

David. We will learn a lot about him, but not today.

Because, in a way, this first story isn't really about him. It doesn't even mention his name until the last verse. All we know and all that Samuel knows about him is that he is one of the sons of Jesse the Bethlehemite.

Unlike King Saul who came from a wealthy family, David did not. His family tree was not distinguished. Jesse's grand mother was an immigrant Moabite woman named Ruth (we know of Ruth in scripture, The Book of Ruth). Ruth's husband was Boaz, who had an ancestor who was a Canaanite prostitute from Jericho. If you were looking for a noble family of Israel, this was not the one you would have chosen. But the sons seem to be an impressive lot, at least according to the eyes of Samuel, but God speaks to his heart and tells him that none of the seven young men standing before him is the one that God has chosen.

There is even a story in the Midrash (Rabbinical writings) that says that each time one of Jesse's sons stood before him, Samuel tried to anoint his head with the oil, but no oil would come out. It was only when Jesse finally called upon the youngest, his eighth son, that oil flowed freely out of the horn.

It may be symbolic that David is the eighth son. In the Bible numbers often have special meanings and seven is the number of completeness, like seven days in a week. That's why the number six can be seen as evil since it falls short of being complete. Just so, eight being one more than seven is seen as

indicating something or someone extraordinary. But you wouldn't have known that if you had been at Jesse's house that day. There was nothing about David that seemed extraordinary.

Samuel certainly must have had questions, wondering if God knew what he was doing:

Having him anoint this youngest son to be king when Israel already has a king--a short-tempered, jealous, powerful King--was capricious, dangerous, and mad.

But this isn't a story about God, or David; It is a story about Samuel.

A story about the enormous trust that Samuel had in God, the trust it took to prophesy in the time of King Saul, and now, while the King still lives, anoint a new King. One hardly big enough to defend himself, let alone a nation.

Do you have the trust of Samuel? How hard is that for us to follow the call of God?

We Trust... but we have good insurance. Trust... but have a pre-nuptial agreement. Trust...but put away for a rainy day. Hoping for the best but being prepared for the worst is a natural human drive.

There is a reason we don't drive 90 miles an hour because we trust God will take care of us. There is a reason we don't embrace risk with joyful abandon, testing God to protect us despite our careless choices. There is a reason we take Covid-19 seriously and implement safe transitional steps in our worship practice. Because God looks to us to take care of our selves and one another.

But poor Samuel. He was on a high wire with no net. He had no choice but to follow the call of God despite danger abounding on every side. Sometimes we have to trust and trust alone that we are doing the right thing. Like Samuel.

I know this was true for me and—I dare say—most pastors when gathering for worship stopped on a dime last spring. All we could do was trust, earnestly seek every pathway to stay together while trusting that our faithfulness to God and one another will be reflected back to us in God’s faithfulness to us.

Trust me, says God. Trust me, says God to Samuel, I'm seeing what you don't see.

Samuel had to trust that this young man was destined for greatness and blessed by the almighty.

The appearance of things can be deceiving. The pandemic and the subsequent abandonment of the sanctuary appeared to tragic, devastating. But God tells Samuel, it is important to look not on the appearance of a person but to see the heart. In ancient times, “heart” was not the center of emotion, but of the will and character of a person. A person who has a heart like God's heart is a person whose will is closely aligned with God's will. That's the compliment given to David. And it is the story of us as well. It was our will, and our character that moved us through these last 15 months with faith and grace and growth. God's Spirit comes upon David and stays with him throughout his life, as God's Spirit is with us. It was not just our efforts week to week that saw us through the last 15 months, it was God's Spirit that draws us together, even when we are not here. It is God's Spirit that calls us and keeps us in holy relationship with God and one another. Trust me, God says. I will walk with you.

Trust that promise.