

Scripture Readings and Sermon

June 13, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on 1 Samuel 16:1-13 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The anointing of David is set in contrast to the selection of Saul in Chapter 9. It was said of Saul that "not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; he stood head and shoulders above everyone else." And when Samuel anointed Saul before the people in Chapter 10, he said, "Do you see the one whom the LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people." Yet, for all of his good looks, Saul had a low self esteem (15:17). When he was to be anointed, he hid among the baggage and when he disobeyed God, Saul blamed his disobedience on the people. By Chapter 15, the Lord has rejected Saul for his lack of obedience. Samuel is ordered by God to execute the king of the Amaleks creating tension between Samuel and Saul. This tension is revealed in Samuel's reluctance to go to Bethlehem as well as in his reception when he arrives. David's anointing, therefore, is done in secret. This begins David's path toward fighting Goliath, being the court musician, and the commanding of the armies of Israel. In contrast to Saul's outward appearance but inward fear, David is portrayed as the littlest in his family and not the most handsome and yet he faced lions to protect his father's sheep. David's strength is not in his outward appearance but is an inward strength built over lonely periods of protecting the sheep with only God as his company. The strong outward appearance of Saul is replaced by the strong inner life of David - his heart.

1 Samuel 16:7 "the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

When have first impressions mislead you?

When has someone gotten the wrong impression concerning you?

Why is it so difficult to look at the heart?

Does it take time to know someone's heart? Do we take the time?

What parts of your heart do you try to hide from others? From God?

Commentary on Mark 4:26-34 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The parable of the growing seed and the mustard seed follows the parable of the sower that scatters seeds on the path, among thorny bushes, in shallow soil, and good soil. Behind the parables is the teaching about the condition of our hearts. The harden hearts and the distracted hearts do not allow the Good News to grow. It is because the hearts have become hardened that Jesus speaks in parables, "they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand" (4:12). Even for those whose hearts are open to God, how the Word takes root and grows is as mysterious as the seed that grows in the field. It is in God's time and by God's grace that the Word grows in our lives. Through repentance a stalk of humility is produced and then the head of faith is formed. From that head comes the grain of the kingdom, the fruits of the Spirit. Even when it appears that we have been given just a little grace, from the grace can grow a tree of faith which becomes a shelter and inspiration to those around us. The secret of the kingdom of heaven is not about a Holy City but about a holy heart.

Mark 4:27 "the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how."

Is it easier to have faith in a rural setting than in a city?

How does relying upon nature deepen your faith?

Have you ever been through a long drought simply waiting on the rain?

If we can have faith in a seed or rain or gravity than why do we doubt their creator?

Is the very nature of a parable faith?

Commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:6-17 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Paul continues his focus on the fragility of the mortal life or life in "clay jars". While our true spiritual home is with God, we have a temporal home in our physical bodies. We should not let that temporal home rule our lives but we should remember to live according to our spiritual home. This means that we view things through the spiritual eyes of faith and not our physical eyes. We will be judged on how we have spiritually lived in this physical world. Faith gives us a sense of how we are doing through our conscience. Paul notes, however, that the world still judges us by outward appearance and not our spiritual seat, the heart. When we are young, we seek the approval of those judges often to the detriment of our spiritual self. In Christ, however, our soul is restored and we are given eyes to see past outward appearances to the truth of the matter. It is through the working of Christ by the Holy Spirit that we can begin to walk by faith and not only by sight.

2 Corinthians 5:12 you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart.

Have you ever tried to explain a difficult emotion?

Even when you try to show the emotion, has it ever fallen short?

How much more difficult is it to explain faith?

Why do people have more faith in a cell phone working than in God?

Is it because we can physically hold a phone and we can only hold God in our heart?

Sermon "We speak of hidden things" ([Sermon Video](#))

All three scriptures this week refer to the hidden work of God. God looks not on outward appearance but on the hidden heart in choosing David. Jesus speaks of the seed that grows in secret only to burst forth as grain or a mighty shrub. Paul urges us to walk not by sight but by faith from the heart because we are a new creation born from above. The work of grace is a hidden work even from the believer. Even so, there are spiritual practices that can open us up to this work of God.

The first practice is the practice of repentance. Repentance has received a bad reputation because of those who practice extreme acts of contrition. One of the tenants of the protestant tradition is the firm assertion that nothing we can do including acts of repentance can earn God's love. Instead, repentance should be viewed as the daily act of remembering that we are not God. When we humbly release our illusion of control, we can begin to experience the power of God working in our lives. While this sounds easy, it is incredibly difficult given that our world functions based on the illusion of control. So how can we remind ourselves that we are not responsible for the salvation of ourselves or our world? One way is to think of repentance the same way we think of fiber in our diet. We need grain and fiber to ensure that our digestive track functions properly. Spiritually, repentance helps to break apart our pride and false sense of self importance. With these blockages removed, we can humbly and thankfully receive and let go of everything the world gives us. We find a balance between thinking too much or too little of ourselves. When we daily remember that God is God and we are a part of God's creation, our hearts become more open to the harmony and shalom God intended.

Another practice is being present with God. Just as experts recommend good sleep, daily exercise, and periods of calm breathing for a healthy heart, these can also be good for the soul. Throughout scripture, God speaks to us through our dreams. When we give God the successes and failures of our day, we often find a more peaceful sleep. This can also happen when we give God our concerns for an upcoming event before going to bed. In our sleep, God will sometimes provide new insight and options so that in the morning we are equipped to face the challenge. During the day, if we take time, maybe five minutes four times a day, to walk with Jesus, we will not only feel healthier and refreshed but we will experience a new perspective upon our day. Taking the same amount of time to simply be still and breath deeply allows us to calm our thoughts and center ourselves in God's presence.

While all of these practices are good for the body, they also draw us deeper into the hidden mystery of God where the work of the Spirit is done.

A final practice is attentive listening. The Holy Spirit is constantly working within us to both equip and convict us. Just as we listen to our bodies to remind us to drink or eat certain foods with minerals and vitamins we need, we must listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. When we feel suddenly passionate about something or a piece of news catches our attention, it is time to seek discernment from the Spirit concerning what God is trying to say to us. We may be moved to action, prayer, or seeking deeper understanding. By attentively listening to the workings of God in our hearts, we soon begin to see God revealing a better and fuller life.

By incorporating a few spiritual practices into our lives, we begin to open our hearts to the power and mystery of God. This walking by faith soon results in spiritual fruits that enrich not only our lives but the lives of those around us. God is doing and will do incredible things in our lives even if they seem hidden to the world around us.