

First Baptist Church of Augusta

1 Samuel 15:34-16:13; Psalm 20

“Do You See What God Sees?”

June 14, 2009

1 Samuel 15:34-16:13

34 Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul.

35 Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel.

NAU 1 Samuel 16:1 *Now the LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? **Fill your horn** with oil and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have selected a king for Myself among his sons." 2 But Samuel said, "How can I go? When 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.' 3 "You shall invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for Me the one whom I designate to you." 4 So Samuel did what the LORD said, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the city came **trembling** to meet him and said, "Do you come in peace?" 5 He said, "In peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." He also consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. 6 When they entered, he **looked** at Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD'S anointed is before Him." 7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "**Do not look** at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*

...11 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." 12 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." 13 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.

Do you see what God sees? In this world and in our lives, we are often blinded by disappointments and failure, and we do not see the Holy Abiding. Do you see what God sees, in this rather messy story of kings and prophets and families?

This story begins on a solid note of disappointment. Samuel is a prophet of God and a king-maker. He is the one that anointed Saul to be Israel's first king. To be sure, Samuel was not supportive of Israel having a king, claiming that God is to be their only monarch, yet, he was not unwilling to change his mind. If they want a king, so be it, and so Samuel, prophet of God, anoints Saul to be their king. In time, King Saul turns out to be a disappointment. Samuel is in no mood to say, I told you so, because, Saul is not so much a villain, as he is a tragic figure. *Samuel grieved over Saul.* (15:35)

Maybe Samuel grieves over what might have been, because all he can see are the failed opportunities and dreams that are now dashed. We have all been there...grieving over past failures, mistakes, loss, and disappointments. "I wish..." often begins a sentence leading to regret.

But, it is not just Samuel who is disappointed in Saul - even God is grieving: *And the LORD was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel.* (15:35b). In a careful reading of 1 and 2 Samuel, we get a picture of God, who does not command a predetermined path, that all must follow, where no individual response can alter the plan. Indeed, even God is changing directions, according to human responses. Saul was suppose to be the one who would faithfully lead Israel, but now, God is sorry (here the Hebrew word can also be translated as regret) that he allowed this to happen.

Does this trouble you? That God can be sorry– that God can regret? It is troubling, if your idea is that God has got it all planned out, and we are but mere actors on this stage of life. For me, however, not only am I set free, but so is my idea of God. God is set free to partner with us, and God joining us includes meeting with us in our failures, our disappointments, our tragedies and in our grief.

When life seems to be snuffed out or blunted with failure, there is the Divine commitment to change alongside us, that we may still realize newness.

God says to his servant Samuel – move on, **“Fill your horn with oil and set out.”** (v. 1) We can be sorry about our past. We can even grieve over it. We can easily realize that there have been missed chances and squandered opportunities. But don’t stay there. Get on with the business of life. Saul may have failed. Samuel may be disappointed. Israel may be a mess. But all is not lost. There is a future. There is a new beginning. Get on with the business of living. *“Fill your horn with oil and set out.”*

Leadership consultants often challenge business persons with two questions: What is your business? How is business? Let me tweak this a bit, and ask the following questions for each of us: What is your business with your one life? How’s business? How are you doing with your life? I am not asking about your career, or your relationships, or your parents, or children, or school. How are you doing with your life?

Certainly, we can sit back and be passive in life, thinking that God is going to make it all work out in the end. “The Lord will take care of this,” we say, to assuage our irresponsibility and be resolved if not resigned to a fatalistic future. Or, we can choose to share in Samuel’s call as also our own: **“Fill your horn with oil and set out.”**

Samuel is told to set out and to fill your horn with oil, because the failed king is to be replaced with a new king. God goes on to say three things to the disappointed and perhaps disillusioned prophet Samuel in verse one and three:

I will send you..._

I have selected ...

I will show you what you shall do.

Just as God has engaged the children of Israel in the past, God will be faithful to Samuel in the present. God takes initiative and God works with intention.

Samuel shows up at the house of a man named Jesse, to anoint another king for Israel. Like a male beauty pageant, the contestants are lined up, one by one and already Samuel is impressed. The first son is Eliab. His name means “God is father.” Surely, thought Samuel, this is the Lord’s King. He has the name for it and he is the first-born, pick of the litter. Then we have this wonderful line where God says to Samuel in verse 7: ... *the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.*

And one by one, the sons pass by Samuel – seven of them – and one by one each is rejected. Samuel asks are there any others? “Sure,” says Jesse, an eighth one. “But you don’t want him. He is the eighth son, the youngest; we don’t even keep him around here, so, he is out in the fields watching over the livestock.” It is like they have forgotten about this eighth child.

Of course, we know how this part of the story ends. David is fetched from the field and Samuel says that’s the guy, opens up the horn of oil and pours it over him as a sign of divine anointing. This youngster, still green-behind-the-ears, forgotten shepherd boy, is going to be the next king over the people of God.

The narrative of David, is a picture of God continuing to do new things in life. That is grace, is it not? A gift. The old – Saul – along with his disobedience, arrogance, and ineptitude, does not mark an end to God’s initiative. Saul is being displaced with God doing something new through David. Up until this point, we have

read nothing of David. We don't even learn of his name until verse 13. It is a marvelous story of an unknown shepherd boy who would become king.

“David is not a human accident, but a divine intention.” (Brueggemann) Could it be that is the nature of God, as God relates with each of us? Is it too sweeping to assume that for God there are no accidents among us? Once again, I do not mean that everything that happens in this world is due to a predetermined will. It is clear, even in this story, there are events that are regrettable, even to God. But all things and all people can be part of a larger “divine intention.” Political stratagem won't get it. Looks don't count. David has no credentials and no social claims to make. Being the eighth son, put him at the back of the litter. In ancient Palestine, it was the first-born who received any honor or social claims. But God chose him.

This story, where all we see is grief and disappointment, comes around to the grace of God's initiative and God's intention. If God has an intention for you, (and I believe God does) and an intention for this church, (this also I believe) what then is our response? How are we living intentionally? Divine intention is a clue of the reality of grace.

We may not see such grace, because, quite frankly, the failures of the past dull our vision. **In the end, it all comes down to what we “see.”**

We read throughout this story about looking and seeing: In verse one, God “sees” a king among the sons of Jesse. In verse 6, Samuel saw Eliab, the first born of Jesse, and thought, surely this must be what God is seeing. Yet in verse 7, God reminds Samuel, “*for the LORD does not see as mortals see...*”

We see skin color, and so, we draw up racial lines of division that have haunted this nation since its founding. We see nationality, and become fearful and insecure. We see rich and poor, and find ourselves resentful against the rich or the poor. We see liberal urbanites, or trailer park red-necks, or conservative suburbanites, or country club bourgeoisie, and sadly, see nothing else.

It is amazing what God sees and what we miss. In verse 12, God sees what others do not. David is the eighth among the sons of Jesse. He is the youngest, and by ancient Palestinian culture, the lowest. He is by all standards, the least likely, and no one thinks to look in the back pastures for him. God's promises are so often left forgotten about in the hinterlands, shoved away in the closet.

I Corinthians 1: 27, *But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are...*”

That is why I believe God takes initiative – because God sees things we don't. We see outward appearances. We see limits – God sees possibility. We see the end – God sees a future. We see barriers - God sees opportunities. We see unpardonable failures – God sees promise and grace.

What do you see in your life? What do you see in others?

This narrative joins with the other rich stories of scripture that reminds us of the unlikely vessels of God's grace. “God finds possibilities for grace in the most unexpected places and through the most unlikely persons.” (*New Interpreter's Bible*)

God does not need a powerbroker with all the connections.

God does not need a political scheme and clever subterfuge.

God does not need expansive church budgets or even steeples that scrape the clouds.

God does not need preachers, who think they have all the answers.

God *does* need people to see as God sees and answers the call.

When we feel like we have been forgotten and left out to pasture to tend to the menial tasks of watching sheep and folding the laundry, God calls. God graces.

When we see as God sees, a future, once forgotten about or left for dead, opens up. Our regrets, disappointments, failures, and loss give way to a life waiting to be lived.

Do you see what God sees?