

What Does God See in Me?

Liturgical Year A

Seeds Of Hope

March 19, 2023

1 Samuel 16:1-13

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel were formulated by a variety of authors. The list of authors include Samuel, the Deuteronomists school family that lived around 640 BCE, the Story of Hannah 1 Samuel 2:1-10 that was written decades earlier and who knows who else dipped their hands into its writing. Our book was poorly preserved and misinterpreted for many years. Like other books in the Old Testament Samuel is filled with story and history.

Reading the book of Samuel reminds me of ace reporter Clark Kent of the Daily Planet turning into Superman saving the city of Gotham. Instead of Superman we have a smelly young sheep herder being appointed by God to become the king of Israel.

David sings to the disturbed king, Saul, he slays Goliath, commits adultery with Uriah, has her husband killed, wins many battles, writes many of the psalms in the book of Psalms and much of our scripture is fascinated with this guy, even the lineage of Jesus can be traced back to David.

With many even disputing the life of David and a book filled with myth and history, "I stand by my scripture." This is the hand I have been dealt and this is the hand I shall play. My life is filled with myth and history yet there are lessons to be learned from me. Sitting around trying to pull the Bible apart gets one nowhere and thinking all the stories in the Bible actually took place gets one nowhere.

Every time I approach the text, I am reminded of two of Brueggemann's comments. "The Bible is Not the word of God, but one

can find the Words of God in the Bible.” Secondly, “what the church thinks about and does with the Bible is exceedingly important.”

So, like Clark Kent lets enter the closet and see how we come out. I know I will not emerge with a sling shot killing Goliath nor will I be killing my thousands while Saul only killed hundreds. Let us boldly walk where no other person has dared to venture and see what happens.

Our story line has a tall, athletic appearing king Saul from 1200-1020 BCE, resembling a tragic man. He was elected king by his people, but his faithless life was filled with disobedience and unworthiness. He spends most of his time at war, losing most of his battles. Saul did not have the foggiest idea of what it took to be a king, nor did he understand Israel’s faith. If Israel is to have any kind of a future, Saul is not their man.

In a dark corner beating his breasts is devastated Samuel, Israel’s last Judge. Judges prior to Samuel were Ehud, who was left handed, Deborah who led a successful liberation movement, and Gideon who chose his army by how they drank from the river. In the Old Testament a Judge does not wear a black robe but she or he intervenes between God and the people. Samuel anointed Saul, now he is full of regrets.

We need to remember that Samuel was not too keen with the idea of having a king. Samuel’s role in this kingship idea was to make his kingship legal by anointing him plus he was to give the king counsel and to be his conscience. Maybe Samuel felt that he failed God and went off to the closet to sulk.

Songwriter and singer Harry Chapin said, “when in doubt do something.” According to our story, God intervenes and sends our judge, Samuel to anoint a new king. Action is called for and God directs Samuel out of his closet of sorrow to Palestine to find himself a new king, a king who will be obedient to God.

God directs Samuel to a certain family and a beauty contest takes place where seven sons are placed on display. As Peggy Lee sang, "is that all there is?" The old man thought seven was the perfect number but he did have one more son.

According to the text "God was looking for a man after his own heart." In other words, a person who would be obedient to God, one with a warm, loving heart. God chose the youngest son, one with a gentle spirit.

Throughout the Bible people connected with the land or sheep were appointed, Moses was tending his fathers-in-law sheep, Elijah was plowing with 12 oxen and shepherds on the hill side were first invited to see the baby Jesus.

The text is not about a smelly shepherd becoming a king, but God using people with kind hearts who are willing to be trained before coming a "king." The narrator of this text pulls a twist on us. Up to now we were led to believe that God chooses by what is in our hearts now he describes the eighth son as having fair skin and was handsome.

What does God see in us? Like king David we have all sinned and done wrong, but how pure is our heart? May we all come out of our closets of pain and sorrow and see that God has a place for us all. May we all emerge as "a person of God's own heart."

Let us not vilify ourselves with past decisions that were bad, but may we emerge feeling God's love and mercy. When we label ourselves as a sinner, a loser, the picture of ourselves is only a flat snap shop that is static. God sees much more in us all. Labels are a mere surface image of ourselves, we are much more in the eyes of God.

Bonhoeffer said, “judging others or ourselves, only makes us blind to the beauty of the world around us.” I added a few words to Bonhoeffer’s comment. Being as narrator, I can do that.

For me this text is calling us all to get out of the field tending to a flock of sheep and be more open, have a spirit of adventure, a delight in trying new things, letting God work through us, not to be closed minded, not to claim we know it all, live a life where the future offers new possibilities and we are open to mystery, open to the spirit of God confronting us.

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