

**Proper 6B****1 Samuel 16****Saul, David and Solomon #1****Pastor Wayne Peterson****June 18, 2006****Samuel Anoints David**

<sup>34</sup>Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul. <sup>35</sup>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.

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."<sup>4</sup> Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?"<sup>5</sup> He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

<sup>6</sup>When they came, he looked on Eliab 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. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah. (1 Samuel 15:34—16:13)

Today we begin an 11-week series on a very important 100-year period in the history of the people of Israel. It is often called the United Monarchy, for it is the only period of time in which all the people of Israel were united under one king.

The United Monarchy is the third of four significant periods in the Old Testament. The first is the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – the Age of the Patriarchs, which begins roughly around 2000 B.C. The Lord God calls Abraham for a special purpose and promises three things – the land of Canaan, a family of many descendants, and that through these descendants God would bless all the nations of the earth. The book of Genesis ends with Jacob (also known as Israel) and his twelve sons and their families living in Egypt.

The second significant period is called the Exodus. The people of Israel, quite numerous after living in Egypt for a couple of hundred years, have been made slaves by the Pharaoh. God calls Moses to lead the people out of their bondage and bring them back to the land promised to Abraham. This takes place around the year 1250 B.C.

Moses dies on the threshold of the Promised Land and under the leadership of Joshua the twelve tribes of Israel begin the process of occupying the Promised Land. The next 150 years are somewhat chaotic as the twelve tribes divvy up the land of Canaan, each staking claim to an area. There is no centralized government during this time and the tribes are fairly independent, working with each other only in time of crisis or war, which if you read the Book of Judges, seems to be most of the time. In these times of crisis, leaders called “judges” would arise to get the tribes to work together. The people of Israel might have characterized themselves as being a theocracy during this time, understanding the Lord God to be their king.

One of these judges was a man named Samuel. Samuel was recognized as being a spokesperson (prophet) of the Lord God, so when people looked at the nations around them that had kings and thought that it would be a good idea for Israel to have a king, they came to Samuel and urged him to select a king for them. Samuel initially warned them having a king was not a good idea. A king would make them pay taxes. A king would draft their sons into the army. A king could become a corrupt leader. But the people were insistent and Samuel finally acceded to their wishes and anointed Saul from the tribe of Benjamin as the first king of a united Israel.

Saul’s reign was marked by continuous military campaigns, primarily with the Philistines to the west and the Amalekites to the south. Samuel became disenchanted with Saul because of two incidents. First was a time when Saul preparing for a battle with the Philistines and was waiting for Samuel to come and offer a sacrifice to the Lord God to beseech God’s assistance to win the battle. Samuel didn’t arrive when Saul expected, so Saul offered the sacrifice himself. Samuel was angry that Saul had done this, for by offering the sacrifice Saul was going beyond his political authority and assuming religious authority he was not supposed to have.

In a second incident, Samuel gave Saul specific instructions for a battle with the Amalekites, specifying that the Israelites were to utterly destroy the enemy, killing not only the soldiers, but also all women, children, and livestock. The reason Samuel gives for this harsh order is that the Amalekites had opposed the Israelites when they first came from Egypt. It is hard for us to hear that Saul was to show no mercy in this situation. Saul for the most part followed the instructions, killing all the people, but he kept most of the sheep and cattle. Samuel interpreted this as greed – that Saul was keeping the spoils of war for his own benefit. Samuel chastises Saul and tells him that the Lord God regrets making Saul king and that Samuel is going to start looking for a new king.

This is the point in the saga where our scripture reading today picks up the story. The Lord God instructs Samuel to go to Bethlehem to the home of Jesse and anoint one of his eight sons as king. This is the first time we hear of David, but this first story is not really about David. Nor is it about primarily about Samuel. First and foremost, this is a story that tells us about the Lord God. It is a story about vision.

At one level, vision is the ability to see. We go to an optometrist to get our vision checked to find out if we need glasses. But on another level, vision is the ability to see something that may not be readily apparent to others no matter how good their physical eyesight is. This concept of vision is not so much about sight as it is about insight.

When Samuel was told by God to find someone who would replace King Saul and that this someone would be one of the sons of Jesse, Samuel didn't think this would be an especially difficult task. He thought he could tell just by looking at a person who would make a good leader. Jesse had eight sons, and the elder brothers were strong, athletic, and probably handsome. Samuel was ready to simply anoint one of these elder brothers, but God said, "No." Samuel's eyesight was fine, but his vision wasn't so good. God told him that the measure of a person is not outward appearance, but inner character. God told Samuel to anoint the youngest son, David, a lad perhaps in his early teens. God chose David not by sight, but by insight. God chose David by vision.

This is not the only time we learn that God often works in ways that are mysterious to a human way of thinking. We humans have always had a tendency to evaluate people on the basis of external attributes – how rich they are, how beautiful they are, how strong they are, how talented they are. As far as God is concerned, those are not the most important attributes. God's criteria are often upside down from what we would expect. When Mary learns from the angel that she will bear a son who is the son of the Most High God, Mary is filled with awe that she, a lowly, peasant young woman, has this great honor. She sings, "The mighty One has done great things for me. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." (Luke 1)

The apostle Paul talks about the folly of his message, that the death of Jesus is God acting in the world. He writes, "For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength." (1 Corinthians 1:22-25)

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus describes the kingdom of God, the way in which God is active in the world, as being like a mustard seed. Jesus calls the mustard seed the smallest of seeds, implying that one would not expect much of a plant to come from such a small seed, but that little seed has a big surprise, growing into a large shrub, big enough to provide shelter for nesting birds. The kingdom of God is like that, he says.

God's choice of David confounds Samuel, Jesse, and David's brothers. Perhaps the significance of this story for us is to remind us that God works in mysterious ways, so we should always be humble enough to look for God at work in places where most people would be surprised and maybe even shocked. God has the vision to see what is in our hearts. He knows us through and through. Shocking as it may be, maybe God is looking to work through you. It could happen.