

The Good Shepherd
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1 Samuel 16: 1-13
November 18, 2018

We are in the second week of a series on King David. As we approach Advent, we will be hearing the connections that gospel writers and hymn writers will be making between Jesus and David. To better understand our story of Jesus, and what it is that God may be birthing in our hearts, it is helpful to spend some time with David.

I'm going to talk a little about the events that lead to our chapter for today and then I'll talk about the heart.

I love the call stories of the Bible.

Prophets have call stories, stories where they are claimed and sent. Kings have anointing stories which function in a similar way. These are the stories where God adopts the king as the Son of God, and the Spirit falls upon them and empowers them going forward. Jesus has a call story, an anointing story, at his baptism. God adopts him, "You are my son with whom I am well pleased," and then the Spirit sends him into the wilderness.

In our story for today we have David's first appearance in 1 Samuel. 1 Samuel is telling the story of Israel's first experiences with a king. The previous book in the Bible is the book of Judges. This book tells the story of local leaders who solve the people's problems. Some are faithful. Some are not. God is ultimately the king of the people.

Over time, the people start demanding a human king. This is in part because Samuel the prophet appoints his sons as judges over Israel and they do not inspire confidence. We are told they, "turn aside after gain, perverting justice, taking bribes." You know what they say about prophet's kids.

In chapter 8 of the 1 Samuel, the elders come to Samuel and say, "you are old (ouch) and your sons are not trustworthy (ouch again) appoint for us a king to govern us, like all the other nations have." We want to be like everyone else. We don't want to be different anymore.

Samuel prays to God and God says with some bitterness, “ok, you asked for it people, but I’m going to tell you what Kings are like. In verses 11 - 17 we have a vision of what bad leadership looks like.

“[The king] will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots; and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. He will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take 1/10th of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take 1/10th of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves.

1 Samuel says that a king without a moral compass, one who doesn’t have a heart for following God’s way, this alternative to Pharaoh’s empire given in the 10 Commandments and all that follows; that king will *take* from the people, rather than serve the needs of the people.

These few verses capture a key message of the books of the prophets as a whole. The concern of the prophets is idolatry because paying attention to Yahweh keeps a king focused on more than himself and directs his attention to the needs of the people.

Last week, Pastor Abby talked about the Bible giving us an alternative understanding of the use of power. The key question of the Bible here is whether kings will use their power for selfish ends, or for the people.

God says, “if I put a king over you, don’t come crying to me when it goes bad.” The people say, “We don’t care. We want a king who will go out and fight our battles!”

God says, “(Sigh) ok” and tells Samuel to set a king over them.

The first king God tells Samuel to anoint is Saul. This is what we are told about Saul in chapter 9. “Saul was a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of

Israel more handsome than he; he stood head and shoulders above everyone else.” Saul has the appearance of royalty. He was voted most likely to be king by his senior class. Saul is anointed by Samuel, he has an anointing story. He is told that the Spirit will possess him.

Saul immediately disappoints. At the time he is to be presented to the people, he is found hiding in the baggage. Not a good sign. He is fearful and impatient and selfish. Saul doesn't listen to Samuel and then he doesn't listen to God. Uh oh. God has a quick hook, and decides to make a change right away.

That's where today's story starts. Samuel is grieving the fall of Saul and God says, “You have to move on Samuel, there are more fish in the sea.”

God sends Samuel out in a sneaky way to anoint another king while Saul is still king. Samuel is afraid. He knows this is treason. God doesn't care.

When Samuel sees the sons of Jesse, the eldest Eliab comes out and he's tall, handsome, surely this must be the one. Samuel is ready to anoint. God whispers in Samuel's ear, “not that one. Let's not make the same mistake twice. This time, I'm going to look on the heart.”

God wants a king with a heart for Yahweh, a heart that will be drawn beyond selfish instincts to serve the people, a heart in good and bad that will try to stay rooted in the way of God.

Samuel goes through all the sons of Jesse, God doesn't like any of them, but finds that there is still one that is watching the sheep. Ohhh, that's a clue. In the ancient world, kings were known as shepherds.

God sees David and tells Samuel to rise and anoint, “this is the one!” It is hard to internalize how surprising this story is. David is the weak 8th son. He's the one left behind watching the sheep. Left behind 8th sons don't rise to power. The eldest sons do. The strongest do. This is an underdog story, for an underdog people. This is a story of the world being turned upside down, of the last becoming first for a people that were abused by power and faced injustice.

At the center of our Bible is a story about changing things. There's a love in our midst that wants to turn upside down what is corrupt and does damage. There is a love in our midst that will work in unconventional ways through surprising people from surprising circumstances. David's background represents this. Jesus stands on this whole story as another underdog for an underdog people. He's the son of a carpenter and a young girl, from Nazareth, from nowhere. Yet he is the Messiah which is Hebrew for anointed one. He is God's king, the Spirit is with him as he goes about his ministry.

Similarly, the spirit is now with David and immediately following this scene we are told that the spirit leaves Saul and an evil spirit fills him. After that David goes off to battle with Goliath. He has the Spirit with him and he trusts, Goliath falls, David is off to a good start.

The promise of David, the hope is that he will be a different kind of king, one with a heart that stays rooted in the way of God and that looks outward to the needs of the people. David will not be perfect, Abby will talk about that next week, but the hope is that David will be a different kind of king.

This is the hope for the Messiah. This is the hope for the church that is Christ's body now, that we will be a different kind of people. There's a love here, the power of the Spirit is on us, empowering us to turn beyond ourselves towards one another, to serve one another. This is God's hope for us.

When I was in seminary one of my professors said that ultimately, religion was a matter of the heart. It was ironic coming from him because he was the most academic of them all. What he was saying though was that religion wasn't about doctrine, right belief or an apparatus of rules and regulations, religion is about opening our whole selves to being shaped by the Holy. Religion is concerned with what moves us to awe and wonder, gratefulness and hope, because those feelings connect us to the whole. By connecting us to the whole, religion pulls us beyond ourselves, turns us outward, towards others in love and service. As we practice in a religious tradition, our whole selves are shaped, our hearts are shaped.

God wants our hearts. Not in the sense of a narrow, rigid religiosity that is exclusive and life-denying. God wants our hearts because as we give our whole selves to this surprising love in our midst, we make more and more connections to one another.

This week, I was thumbing through Parker Palmer's book, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. Parker writes, "Leadership" is a concept we often resist. It seems immodest, even self-aggrandizing, to think of ourselves as leaders. But if it is true that we are made for community, then leadership is everyone's vocation, and it can be an evasion to insist that it is not. When we live in the close-knit ecosystem called community, everyone follows and everyone leads.

He continues, "the power for authentic leadership...is found not in external arrangements, but in the human heart. Authentic leaders in every setting - from families to nation states - aim at liberating the heart, their own and others', so that its powers can liberate the world."

God wants our hearts, to break them open, that we may trust that we have the love we need, enough to turn more and more towards others. God wants our hearts to keep leading us all on a journey of transformation. One that has the power to turn life upside down because there is love here that desires what is good. May we trust and open our hearts and live. Amen.