



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
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JUNE 17, 2018
THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

This One!
I Samuel 16:1-13; Mark 4:26-34

A father couldn't be prouder than Jesse was on that balmy spring afternoon when he paraded his sons in to meet the prophet of God—unless, of course, he was introducing his daughters as well. It was three thousand years ago and cultural norms were a bit different. Fortunately, today dads are able to see both daughters and sons make their ways in the world in whatever forms they choose.

Nevertheless, Jesse was proud. In walked seven tall, strong, good-looking, and smart young men, from the oldest to the youngest. Each one met the prophet Samuel who was God's emissary on earth. There could be no greater honor for these young men.

They had no clue as to why Samuel had come to their little town of Bethlehem. He showed up unannounced and said he wanted to hold a special service of thanksgiving to God with the people of the town and made a point to ask Jesse to bring his sons for him to meet.

What they did not know, and what Samuel would not divulge, is that he was on a mission from God—a mission to choose the next king of Israel. True, Saul was still the king, but things were not going well. God had long refused to allow his people a king because he saw the problems that arose in other nations. The Hebrews would not listen, however, and, like kids in a sandbox, they would not be denied what everyone else had. Like all of their neighbors, they must have a king! And, like a weary and worn-down parent, God said okay.

At first, Saul did well as the first king, but problems arose. God confided in his prophet that something had to be done. A new king must be found. He instructed Samuel to travel to Bethlehem and there, among Jesse's sons, he would find the new king. As Samuel stood looking at this fine group of young men, he knew that God had been right. Surely, among these seven, was the future king of Israel! Standing beside them was their proud father.

Samuel began greeting them one by one. First up was Eliab, the eldest son. He looked like a king! He carried himself well and spoke confidently but respectfully to the prophet. "My job is done!" thought Samuel. "He has to be God's choice for king." God, however, had a different idea. "Do not look at his appearance or his height or any of the outward things that you humans value," God said. "I look on the heart."

Abinidab, the next oldest son stepped forward and again, Samuel thought he must be God's choice Surely such a tall, strong, well-mannered young man must have a good heart also. Again, God said, "No, he is not my choice."

Five more sons came before Samuel and five more times God did not choose any of them. Confused, frustrated, and anxious, Samuel asked Jesse, "Do you happen to have another son somewhere?" "It just so happens that I do," he answered, and the youngest son, David, was summoned from the pasture.

This young fellow, like his brothers, was also handsome and ruddy from spending so much time outdoors. No doubt he looked a bit disheveled from sleeping in a grass bed and dragging errant sheep out of thickets. He probably smelled more like a sheep than a boy, but Samuel and God detected something special about him. His heart was open. "This one! Anoint this one!" God said. And the next king of Israel was chosen.

This past week, our children learned about David in Vacation Bible School. They discovered how he was chosen, his gifts as a shepherd, the beautiful psalms he wrote, the deep friendship he shared with Jonathan, and his becoming King of Israel. They learned that David possessed a certain strength that was not only physical. In his confrontation with the Philistine giant Goliath, David demonstrated the power of his courage and his loyalty to God.

David valued friendship and was close to Jonathan, the son of King Saul. Although the king was determined to kill him, the two young men held onto their friendship despite competing interests all around.

I suspect that it was David's shepherding abilities that first caught God's attention. As a shepherd, David had to provide food and water for his sheep. Day by day, he moved the flock from place to place so that they would be healthy. He went after lambs that strayed away and took care of any of the sheep that became injured. Putting himself at risk, he fended off wild animals that attacked the sheep. These skills, learned while taking care of his family's

livelihood, would serve him well as a trusted king who provided for the well-being and protection of his people.

David had a lot of time to think as his sheep pastured. He must have thought a lot about God. Perhaps he rehearsed the stories of his ancestors which told him who God was. He may have thought about God's care of his people through all kinds of circumstances and likened God to a shepherd and his people to sheep. Surely he wondered about all of the mysteries of life and the questions that never seem to have answers. I imagine that on those days when the sheep were feeding in green pastures or resting beside still waters, David composed some of the psalms that express his awe and love for God. On the dark nights when the growls of lions and the howls of wolves could be heard nearby, he may have voiced the psalms that ask eternal questions and send prayers to God. Surely such sincere devotion did not escape God's notice.

It is a wonderful story, this tale of how David was chosen to be king. He was just a boy, on the cusp of adulthood, so he was not yet ready to be king, but his heart and mind were obviously headed in the right direction. God used the subsequent years to prepare David to lead his people.

Last Monday morning, as I shared this story with the children at Vacation Bible School, I looked at all of those bright and eager faces and I wondered what God would be choosing them to do in the coming years. No doubt there were future artists and musicians, technology wizards and entrepreneurs, teachers and shop owners and ministers and nurses and doctors and community leaders in each group. We don't have any opening for kings or queens in our country, but there might have been a mayor or governor or president in the crowd. Who knows? David didn't. His father Jesse didn't. None of his brothers had a clue that he would be the next king. Only Samuel and God had insight into what God had in store for David. What might God have in store for our children?

Jesus told a lot of parables about farming. Sometimes I wonder if at some point he had spent time farming instead of carpentering. Anyway, his farming stories were easily understood by everyone, so they were popular. He told the story we heard earlier describing the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is how we live when we believe God really is in the world.

Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how" (Mark 4:26-27). There is mystery at work here. The only thing known is that seed is scattered. Wonder of

wonders, it sprouts and grows and produces all kinds of delicious food. Perhaps God does the same in our lives. Maybe those seeds are kernels of different interests and abilities—things like technology or the arts or business or teaching or health care or governance. I wonder if God waits to see which seeds will sprout in us and guide us in our activities and careers. I also wonder if God sows those other seeds—the seeds of compassion and courage and leadership and justice and loyalty and love for God and one another—waiting to see what will sprout, what we will cultivate and tend, and will bear fruit in us?

I think something like that happens. And I think that we choose which gifts of God we will allow to grow in our lives. I also think—I believe—that all of the good gifts God gives to all of us remain dormant if we do not nurture them so that when we do decide to become more compassionate or courageous or loving or willing to lead or to fight for justice, God will cause those seeds to germinate and sprout and flourish within us. Sometimes, however, we are the ones who determine what fruit will be produced in our lives.

We do not know much about David's brothers except that the oldest three went to battle against the Philistines with King Saul. I imagine that they made good soldiers and were fine, upstanding men throughout their lives, honoring God day by day. The other four may not have been king material either, but I'm certain God gifted them with other abilities needed for their day.

On that special day in Bethlehem, God looked on David's heart and saw something special, something needed in Israel three thousand years ago. And God said, "This one!" This one will serve me as king. This one will shepherd my people Israel. And David did. He was not perfect. He committed several egregious sins, but he confessed and asked God's forgiveness, and continued to seek God's guidance. To this day he is regarded as Israel's greatest king. And to think, God saw something special in David when he was still a boy.

When God looks upon our hearts, what does God see? Is it something special, something needed in this place, at this time? I believe God has sowed seeds of ability and care in each and every one of us. No matter what age we are, there may be within us a seed we do not know we have. Perhaps God sees it sprouting into a special ability that is needed in this place at this time. Perhaps God is saying of you or me, "This one! I choose this one!" And what could make our heavenly Father prouder than for us to say, "Here I am! Use me!"

June 17, 2018

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

We admit that we are not always eager to share our possessions, much less our minds and our hearts, O God. Yet, when we come into this place and think of the many ways we are blessed, we are awed by your generosity and compelled to open our lives to you. Already today we have received many gifts, some almost imperceptible, but none apart from your loving care. Thank you for your goodness to us. Help us to be good to you and to one another, we pray.

Today we think of our fathers and offer thanksgiving for them. For many of us, our father gave us a model for how to live. He provided for us and our family. He helped us to learn how to navigate life with all of its twists and turns. For others of us, our fathers caused a few twists and turns that we are still trying to figure out. Some of us still enjoy our fathers while others have trusted them to your eternal care. This day means many things to us and we pray that you will accept our thanksgiving, our grief, our longing, and our pain. For those of us who are fathers, we pray for guidance and grace as we live into the ever-changing and challenging blessing that is fatherhood. May your steadfast love be a model for our own way of loving.

Today we also remember that sometimes families become separated, causing fear and grief and pain. We pray that all families might find ways to heal old and fresh wounds and discover again the unity you desire for us all. We pray especially for immigrant families who may be separated through no desire of their own. Guide us in our treatment of them. Help us to wisely figure out how to receive people who want and need to come here and remind us that our Lord took refuge in a foreign land as a baby and taught us as an adult to welcome the stranger. Help us to be safe, to be vigilant, and to be compassionate, we pray.

As our heavenly Father, you provide for us in so many ways. We have needs of body, mind, and soul that require expertise and skill. We have illnesses which debilitate us, diseases which frighten us, and challenges which perplex us. Help us, O God, to find the best resources available and to make the best choices for ourselves and the people we love.

Thank you for the people who have cared enough to share their faith with us. Thank you for parents who instilled commitment and love for you. Thank you for the faith that is now ours to share. Thank you, O God, for loving us today and every day. May we return the gift to you. Amen.