

Pastor Gregory P. Fryer
Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
3/2/2008, The Fourth Sunday in Lent
1 Samuel 16:1-13, John 9:1-41

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

And he [Samuel] consecrated Jesse and his sons, and invited them to the sacrifice. ⁶When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’S anointed is before him.” ⁷But 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 sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

There was a report on National Public Radio recently about the height of Presidential candidates. It turns out that over the course of our nation’s history, the taller of the final candidates is usually elected President. I can believe this. I mean, when I think of Abraham Lincoln, for example, I imagine him to be a tall, lean fellow. Maybe many of our Presidents are that way – tall and regal like.

But the Lord looks not upon your stature, but upon your heart. Heretofore, you might have been tending the sheep out in the meadow. You might have been letting your mind wander, skipping stones in the brook, fighting off bear or lion to protect your sheep, composing your psalms. You might have been doing many things prior to eleven o’clock this Sunday morning. But here you are, in the presence of the Lord, who promises that where two or three are gathered together in his name, there is he among them. You are here and the Lord is here, and the Lord sees your heart and means for you to be a king. Over yonder stand the giants — Goliath and others. There is much good work awaiting you, O young King. There is much good work awaiting you, O young Queen.

Imagine that red carpet of old, the one leading up to the prophet Samuel. Samuel has come to anoint a king. That king is to be one of Jesse’s sons. So, they are lined up in procession, ready to stand before the prophet. First on the carpet is Eliab. He is first not only in age, but

also in height. Samuel sees no need to go on. Maybe his eye has cast outward toward the other sons, he has quickly sized them up, and he has made his selection. Eliab for king! The problem is, the Lord judges not as we judge, but according to the heart. Eliab, bless him, might have the heart for many good things in this world, but he does not have the heart to be a king. No shame in that. Few of us have the gifts for political kingship.

The man has height, but not heart – at least not the heart of a king. And that will not do. Israel has already suffered enough through that combination of height, but no heart. Remember that the current king, Saul, is a tall and regal-looking man. In fact, that is of the earliest things we learn about Saul:

¹There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth; ²and he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; from his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people. (1 Samuel 9:1-2, RSV)

So now, in this procession of Jesse’s sons before the prophet, Eliab might be like King

Saul: handsome and head and shoulders taller than the rest. Still, he will not do. The glass slipper – you know, the one that fit Cinderella – it does not fit Eliab.

Nor does it fit any of them. Seven sons sashay before Samuel, but, strangely, none of them is the one. Jesse loved his sons, I am sure, and it probably hurt his feelings that none of them was selected king. But I think the old man should not grieve overmuch about that. It is not that the Lord does not love those sons. It is just that he judges them not to be the man to be king. Plenty of other good work remains in the world for those seven sons.

But what of David? What about the youngest son? Why was he omitted from the procession before the prophet?

The text does not say for sure. It might have been that David was his father's favorite, and the old man just could not bear to think of his youngest son being taken from him to go sit on some throne.

Or the father might have become forgetful, so that he simply lost track of David. He is asked to summon his sons, he gathers all the boys that are in sight, -- seven of them, which is quite a crew – and he is so proud of this collection of fine, young men, that he forgets that one of them is missing. In his old age, that saying about “out of sight, out of mind” has become sadly true for him. He simply has forgotten about David. He'll be glad when he sees the boy again, but for now, he has forgotten him.

Well, however things might be for old Jesse, at least this much is true: though our earthly fathers might neglect and overlook us, our heavenly Father will never do such a thing! What did Isaiah say of old?

Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.(Isaiah 49:15, KJV)

And what is the testimony of Holy Scripture concerning the gaze of our Lord?

For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he knows from afar.(Psalm 138:6, RSV)

Never fear, then, that reality has forgotten you or overlooked you, for the Maker of reality regards you most attentively and most lovingly. You are a David he will not overlook. He has high plans for you.

So, that is the Lord. He wants David and he will have him. Samuel will not go away until Jesse fetches the boy from the field. The Lord has an anointing in mind for young David.

And what of you? What of you young David's out there in the field? The Lord calls you: Come David. Do you mean to come?

Consider the blind man in this morning's Gospel Lesson and take some encouragement from him. Our text says that God does not judge as people judge, for we look upon external things, but God looks upon the heart. Well, the great thing about the blind man in this morning's story is that he judges that way too. He judges not according to what he sees, for he *cannot* see. The man is blind. No, he judges according to the heart, and in so doing, he ends up with the great confession:

³⁸He said, “Lord, I believe”; and he worshiped him.(John 9:38, RSV)

So, what of you young Davids out in the field? The Lord calls you. Do you mean to come? Does not your heart detect an echo of the good you believe in, in the heart of Jesus? Does not heart speak to heart? Do you not hear his story and find yourself moved thereby?

He cannot promise you silver nor gold. Indeed, what he promises is the cross. Yet, do you not find your heart inclining toward him anyway? He himself is heading for the cross — not in some poetic way, but in the violent way of hammers and spikes and blood a'flying. But

Jesus accepts that fate, for he so loves this world that he is willing to suffer for its sake.

And I think you are too. There are good battles out there to be fought for love of the world. There are demons to be overcome, including some personal demons the size of Goliath himself, yet there is a kingdom to build and the Lord bids you to help build it. Why, the Lord intends for you to be a judge of the world. You are meant to judge angels. (1 Cor. 6:2-3) Why piddle around with the ways of sin which hold you back so much?

You have made a good beginning on your kingship, for you have come into the presence of the Lord, whom you will soon see eye to eye in the Blessed Sacrament. Many of you have already been anointed with the oil of baptism. You have already been anointed and declare the “children of God,” which is a high title indeed.

What remains — what always remains as long as we have breath left in our lungs — is to

go out and fight Goliath in the name of the Lord. Go out and be people of love in the name of the Lord, even if you must suffer along the way.

And give yourself credit for this: You have made a good beginning, always to be renewed, in that you are following the example of the early disciples. Rome was not built in a day. Simon the fisherman did not become Peter the Apostle overnight, but rather by sticking close to Jesus and to the other disciples and by being transformed by that holy company.

The Lord does not look upon outward appearances, but upon your heart, and what he sees in *your* heart overwhelms him with love and hope for you. Good adventures lie ahead of us in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to whom belongs glory now and forever. Amen.