

## **I SAMUEL 16:1-13**

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." 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. 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."

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?" He answered, "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. When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord. 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."

Then the Lord called Abinadab, and make him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." Then Jesse made Shaman pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen the one." Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And Jesse answered, "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." 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. 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.

## **THE CHOSEN**

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Where would we be without those who have accepted leadership roles in the church? We would die. No organization can long survive without competent, committed leadership that is dedicated to the mission and success of those who have elected them to the often thankless task of providing their energy and skills to lead us forward into the often perilous future awaiting us. Indeed, we are facing many challenges in the months and years ahead the likes of which we have never seen. We will not only need energy and skills; we will need discernment, courage and fortitude. And we will need what secular organizations do not. We will need spiritually alive individuals who take their faith in Christ seriously and earnestly desire to serve in the world as his disciples. While many may be called, few are Chosen.

The Nominating Committee of your church has spent hours in prayerful consideration of whom they shall call to fulfill that role for Trinity. At the Annual Meeting, you gave assent to their choices and they shall stand before you this morning and commit themselves to the service for which they have been called. We do not take this lightly. We believe we have been guided by the Spirit to request them to present themselves to be ordained and installed into their offices. They are set aside to sacrifice their time and to offer their intelligence and knowledge to this congregation and to the body of the United Presbyterian Church. They will have the power to make decisions and to contribute in consequential ways to the mission of the entire ecclesiastical body.

While electing popes, cardinals and bishops is a highly politicized process due to the hierarchical nature of many churches, we are of the Reformed tradition and that is exactly one of the issues that was being addressed in breaking away from Rome way back when. Almost by necessity, politicization breeds cronyism which ultimately leads to corruption. But as Presbyterians, we elect ruling elders and deacons based upon their ability to serve. Nor are we

like the governments of the world where money and connections are essential ingredients in acquiring and maintaining power. We have no swamps to drain. The main qualification is faithfulness to the Gospel and to the local congregation.

In our lesson for this morning, we find a fascinating account of David's selection as king of Israel. The process for selection was already highly politicized with Saul being the presumptive nominee. In fact, God had already chosen him to be crowned. But Saul then disqualified himself through an overt act of disobedience to a command God had given him.

It is actually a very ugly story which you can read for yourself in chapters 14 and 15 leading up to our lesson. However, to offer you a very brief summary, here is what went down—and you have to realize that the god portrayed in many parts of the Old Testament is a violent, jealous and vengeful deity; one of the many tribal gods worshipped in that part of the world at that time.

So with the throne being empty and Saul in line to occupy it, God, who has a grudge against the Amalekites, instructs Saul to conduct genocide against them, destroying all of the people and all of their livestock—**everything!** But Saul had a relationship with their king, Agag, and not only spared him, but also took the best animals in his herd as booty. And while you might respect Saul for his compassion toward Agag and understand the economic benefits of adding to his own herds the heads of the higher quality stock, God didn't see it that way. So he told his prophet, Samuel, that someone else must be king—which aggrieved Samuel because he was very close to Saul. It was saturated with cronyism. What a mess!

But if not Saul, then who? God directs Samuel to reach out to Jesse who is a prosperous farmer and a respected elder of the Bethlehem community. Jesse, of course, is the father of David and is therefore a central figure in the lineage of Jesus, as mentioned in the genealogy presented in the first chapter of Matthew. Remember that Jesus was of the House and lineage of David which made its home in Bethlehem.

Now Jesse had eight sons and God told Samuel that he would anoint one of them as

king. But God did not tip his hand as to which one. And as you heard in our lesson, each one from the eldest to the youngest is paraded before Samuel who presumes the next king will be among the first seven. But to Samuel's surprise, each in turn is rejected, raising the anxiety and anticipation with each succeeding son. It was like NFL Draft Day! There was no Joe Burrows among them. And finally, only one was left and he wasn't even on anyone's projection sheet because he was the baby of the family and he was out in the pasture with the sheep. But as the Lord said to Samuel: *Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature...for the Lord does not see as mortals see. They look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart....Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed David in the presence of his brothers and the spirit of Lord came mightily upon him from that day forward.*

Quite a story. And in spite of all the murderous genocide, and the blood and gore in the background, what stands out is that God is nobody's crony. If you are going to select leaders based upon their heart rather than their political or physical stature, the list of candidates grows shorter and includes some surprising choices. Yes, David was handsome and he grew to have a taste for women and set up a hit on Bathsheba's Hittite husband, Uriah, after David had impregnated through rape. —he was hardly a perfect person. Perfection does not appear to be on God's set of qualification for leadership. But what David did have was heart. He had courage; he was open to criticism; and when confronted with his sins, he had the spiritual temerity to repent and change his behavior.

When Jesus called his disciples, he skipped over the scholars of the law and the wealthy citizens who could have financed his ministry. Instead, he chose working men who were of common backgrounds. And they were hardly perfect individuals either. Nor could they in any way be described as devout Jews. They violated the Law with impunity. But they knew how to work, to relate to people and to handle themselves in challenging situations. And they were loyal and eager to learn. True, they all ran away when Jesus was arrested, but they ultimately carried his ministry forward after his death and all except one paid for that with his life. God

knew what God was doing.

The people you have chosen to lead you into this very strange future we are facing have all the same qualities—beginning with heart. Please support them in their efforts. Life will be very different for all of us a year from now than it is today. They will need your prayers as they seek the Spirit's guidance in moving us into that unknown.

Reverend Thomas Dunlap June 21, 2020