

Sermon Series: More to the Story
“David” by Jeff McClain
1 Samuel 16:1-13

Boone UMC
July 24, 2016

Have you ever found yourself suddenly in the midst of a conversation you weren't prepared to have? That happened to me this week. I don't even remember what we were doing. Everything seemed totally normal. Then out of the blue my five year old daughter said to me, "I don't think God is real." "*What's that, sweetie?*", I asked while trying to appear calm as my mind frantically searched for an appropriate response. "I don't think God is real", she repeated. *Why's that?* "Because I can't see God, so I don't think he's real."

After I picked up my jaw off the floor and told my heart to stop racing, I collected myself and I acknowledged to her that some people don't think God is real...but lots of people do. I said I believe God is real because I can feel God's love in my heart. She said she didn't feel anything in her heart. Except when her tummy is full, and then it just hurts right here (points to her stomach).

We all want to see God, don't we? Wouldn't faith be so much easier if we could physically see, touch, and audibly speak with God? Although if we could do that, I'm not sure it'd still be called faith.

In scripture, God's chosen people Israel felt similarly. Even though God had led them to the Promised Land and promised to be their ruler and king, the Israelites eventually forgot about God. They tried to govern themselves with a system of judges but they became enmeshed in chaos, injustice, and war. Judges 17:6 says,

"In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes." Israel saw the powerful nations around them being led by kings and they wanted the same thing. They wanted a ruler they could see."

God warned them against having a king but eventually relented. Saul was Israel's first king, anointed by the prophet and judge Samuel. Scripture¹ describes Saul like this, "... 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." It turns out being tall and

¹ 1 Samuel 9:2 NRSV

handsome doesn't make one a good leader. Saul disobeyed God, and Samuel had some harsh words for him.

1 Sam 13:13 Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which he commanded you. The Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever, 14 but now your kingdom will not continue; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart; and the Lord has appointed him to be ruler over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you."

Today we continue our sermon series "More to the Story" by entering into the story of David, the man after God's own heart. Last week Reed preached beautifully from the story of Ruth. David is Ruth's great grandson – the story continues! David is one of Israel's most famous kings, but when we think about him, we often start with the story of David and Goliath. But before David was a giant slayer or a famous king, he was an insignificant shepherd boy. That's where we pick up the story today. Hear this word from 1 Samuel 16.

1 Sam 16:1 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."

2 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.' 3 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."

4 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?"

5 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.

6 When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." 7 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."

8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." 9 Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said,

"Neither has the Lord chosen this one." 10 Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these."

11 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."

12 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."

13 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.

This is the word of God for us, the people of God. **Thanks be to God!**

The original plan for God's people was that God would be their king. As we read in Psalm 99 this morning, "The Lord is king; let the peoples tremble!" That was the plan. God warned about the dangers of an earthly king. But Israel wanted one, so they anointed Saul. After King Saul was disobedient (as God had warned them he'd be), God takes charge of selecting the next king. In verse 1², we read that the new king is the Lord's choice, not Israel's. God says, "I have provided *for myself* a king." This is in direct contrast to the way Saul came to be king. The Hebrew verb used here for God selecting from the sons of Jesse literally means "seen".³ The RSV⁴ translates it "for I have *seen* among his sons a king for myself." God sees things that we don't see.

When Samuel shows up to anoint the next king, Jesse gathers his sons. Samuel takes one look at Eliab and thinks, "This must be the man!" But God warns⁵ Samuel in verse 7, "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." Remember, their first king was tall and good looking, but that didn't make him a good leader. The Lord looks on the heart. God sees things that we don't see.

Jesse parades seven sons past Samuel, but the Lord does not pick any of them. In the Bible, seven is considered to be a number of completeness. The fact that David is the eighth son already tells us he is considered an "outsider" of sorts.⁶ Verse 11 also describes David as the "youngest" son. The Hebrew word used also connotes "smallest", which

² 1 Sam 16:1 ...for I have provided *for myself* a king among his sons. (NRSV)

³ Klein, *Word Biblical Commentary*, p. 160.

⁴ 1 Sam 16:1 ...*for I have seen* among his sons a king for myself. (RSV)

⁵ 1 Sam 16:7 NRSV

⁶ Brueggemann, *Interpretation: First and Second Samuel*, p. 122.

again provides a stark contrast to Saul's height.⁷ What is worse, David was out tending sheep. This was not a prestigious occupation. In fact, anyone could do it. David was so unimportant that his own father did not even bother to invite him inside as a potential option for Samuel.

Can you blame Jesse? No one would have expected David to be king: an outsider among his own family, small in stature, and a meager shepherd? Not exactly a kingly pedigree. When Israel chose their first king, they wanted someone who looked the part – the tall handsome guy. The guy who they could see leading them successfully into battle against their enemies. So they chose Saul, but he didn't work out too well for them. So this time around God chose the king, and God was looking deeper – for “a man after his own heart.”⁸

At this point I have to confess something that bothers me about this passage. Earlier in verse 7, God says “Don't look at appearance; that's how humans judge people.” The phrase translated as “outward appearance” literally means “eyes.” Later⁹ in verse 12, the author tells us David had “beautiful eyes” – the same Hebrew word¹⁰ - and that “he was handsome.” Isn't it interesting that God warns against appearances, yet when we meet David for the first time, appearance is the only characteristic mentioned? Most scholars don't really have a good answer for this irony other than to say perhaps the author, too, was impressed with David's looks. That seems weak to me.

I'd like to think of it more in terms of the eyes being windows to the soul. David's beautiful eyes somehow gave insight into his beautiful heart. But there's no scriptural basis for that, I'm really just trying to rationalize the seeming inconsistency in the text. At any rate, we have already been told that God selected David based on his heart, not his looks. God chooses David even though by the world's standards he's a nobody, an outsider, an afterthought. God sees things that we don't see.

So Samuel anoints David as king. At that moment, verse 13¹¹ says, “the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.” Empowered by God's Holy Spirit, David becomes what God had seen in him all along. The insignificant shepherd boy goes on to defeat Goliath and replace Saul as the next king of Israel. King David's rule was so successful that it came to be the standard by which all future kings of Israel would be judged.

⁷ Klein, p. 161.

⁸ 1 Sam 13:14.

⁹ 1 Sam 16:12 NRSV

¹⁰ Klein, p. 160.

¹¹ 1 Sam 16:13

More than that, David was the forerunner of another king whom the world would not recognize.¹² Isaiah 53:2 prophesies

“for he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.” As Christians we believe that verse points to Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Obviously, we have no idea what Jesus looked like. But from our scripture today we know it doesn't matter. What matters is what his heart looked like. David was a man *after* God's own heart, but Jesus was a man *with* God's own heart. God's heart led Jesus to die on the cross in order that we might live. Jesus allowed his heart to be broken so that our broken hearts might be restored. Jesus gave up his heart so that he could live in ours.

We obviously can't see inside people's hearts. Only God can do that. But we can see what it looks like when someone's heart has encountered Jesus. I was moved this week by a blog post from Luke Edwards.¹³ He shared the story of a woman named Elizabeth, whom some of you know. Elizabeth was and continues to be instrumental in the development of King Street Church, our downtown campus. Elizabeth is one of those people who just knows everyone, especially downtown. Just by being who she is, Elizabeth is connected to nearly everyone who has come to be a part of King Street Church. Many are there because she invited them.

It's not just that she knows people. She takes time to get to know people and be truly present with them, especially during difficult times. Elizabeth once drove a coffee barista to her mother's funeral several hours away because she didn't have a ride. How many of us are aware of when our coffee barista is hurting or in need of something? Elizabeth is. Because she makes it a priority to be present with everyone she encounters. She does this even when it's costly to her. In addition to investing the emotional capital, she's also sacrificing financial capital. She's self-employed. So every minute she spends listening to someone's story is one less minute she could have been working and making money. But she does it anyway. Because she knows that's what Jesus has called her to do. That's the heart of Jesus in action. Elizabeth is a woman after God's own heart.

¹² Isaiah 53:2

¹³ <http://freshexpressionsus.org/2016/07/18/portrait-person-peace-elizabeth/>

Would that we all be that way too. But here's the good news – we all are. Or at least we all have it in us to be. We're all made in God's image. God's Spirit dwells in us and fills our hearts with God's love. We are, by God's design, men and women after God's own heart...even when we can't always see it in ourselves.

To be clear, Elizabeth is the first to admit that she's not always chasing after God's heart. In fact, she was hesitant for me to share about her because that story didn't present the whole story of who she is – both saint and sinner. When I gave her props for what Luke wrote she said to me, “You don't know the half of it! I only *hope* to be that girl!”

Well, King David didn't exactly have it all together either. Sure, he went on to kill Goliath and become Israel's greatest king. But as king he slept with someone else's wife, tried to cover it up, then had the man killed so he could marry her. David, the man after God's own heart, was also a liar, cheater, and murderer. But God sees things we don't see. God still anointed him to do God's work, and God invites us to the same mission.

I want to encourage you today, that even if you've been told by the world (or maybe you've told yourself) that you're not good enough or good looking enough, you're not smart enough or ready enough or holy enough... if you've ever been told you're not *whatever* enough – God sees your heart. With all its aches and failures and darkness. But God also sees your heart with all the light and glory of the resurrected Christ.

Dare to live as a man or woman after God's own heart. Because you are. That's how God made you. That's how Christ redeemed you. And that's how God sees you.

Lest you ever forget, I want us to close together with a prayer. It's one that King David prayed to remind him who made his heart and who could remake it. This prayer is believed to have been written after David committed adultery and murder. And even after all that, David's heart was still after God's heart. Remember and pray this prayer from Psalm 51 the next time you can't see God's goodness in your own heart.

Psalm 51:10-12¹⁴

10 *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.*

11 *Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.*

12 *Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

Lord give us willing spirits to be men and women after your heart. Amen.

¹⁴ Psalm 51:10-12 NRSV

Benediction

There's one thing I didn't get to say in the sermon that I want to remind you of now as we go. As a nation we're obviously in the process of choosing a new leader. Many of us are feeling discouraged when we look at our choices. There are ways in which neither candidate seems to reflect God's heart well in their words and actions. Remember, there were times when King David didn't either. God still worked through David to bring about God's kingdom. God can do it again. Also, each candidate, as much as we may dislike him or her, is a person made in God's image and therefore deserving of our Christian love. Most importantly, before we are Americans or Democrats or Republicans, we are first and foremost Christians. Our leader was already chosen for us before the dawn of creation. He is Jesus Christ, and he's the King of Kings. He'll still be King after November. So go in his peace now, as men and women after God's own heart.