

The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” And Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me.” And the Lord said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’ And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare 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?” And he said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he consecrated 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 before him.” 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 sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen these.” Then Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here.” And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, “Arise, anoint him, for this is he.” Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.

What is the value of my life? Do I have any influence in the world? After I'm gone, will anyone remember me? If that elderly Priest, with beard down to his knees, and the 15 year-old boy, whose paths would cross that day, had been asked these questions, what would their answers have been? Where would they have gone for an answer? Samuel may have gone to his Priestly record: anointings... one failed monarch, or he may have looked back to his mentor and father figure, Eli. The boy, the approval of his dad and mom.

In that society, traditional and patriarchal as it was, of course it would have been that way. Today, perhaps things are a little different. But what I know of every one of us here is that we all long for the approval of our parents, our fathers and our mothers. How much more, then, for this young boy.

Because something significant is happening in Bethlehem today. The Prophet Samuel is told, “I've got a king picked out from the family of Jesse the Bethlehemite.” The boy sees his father, leading his seven other brothers out, all the other men of the family, and “he's left me here.” The boy is looking at sheep, smelling sheep. These two men, one at the beginning of his life and the other at the end,

are each assessing the value of their life.

Now the boy is tempted to say to himself, “Dad left me here because he knows I’m good with sheep; he’s entrusted the family’s wealth with me.” He’s got all kinds of spin to make himself feel better. But the fact of the matter is he was there when Samuel came to the city gate and issued the decree to gather all the sons of Jesse, and he was not included—overlooked maybe, but absent nonetheless.

And now the boy’s thinking, “I guess they only have 7 sons, so what does that make me? Number 8.”

It was a big day in Bethlehem. Samuel is coming to town because his guy, Saul, didn’t work out. And he realizes this probably with no small degree of shame. But now is the time for a new king, for a new time. So Samuel, the Prophet of God, came with his oil and the Spirit—that’s all you needed to anoint a king in Israel. Oh, and you need a person, too.

And God said, “You go to town and bring the sons of Jesse and I’m going to show you which one is mine.” So Samuel lines them up, probably from the tallest to shortest, or eldest to youngest, and the first one is Eliab—tall, athletic, handsome. Eliab is the obvious choice, Eliab is the one who looks most like Saul. And the Holy Spirit says, nope.

Then he goes to Abinadab. Abinadab was the brains, he was the one who used big words to show off his fancy education, he had sharp and fiery eyes behind those wire rimmed glasses. Abinadab was the next obvious choice, and the Holy Spirit says nope.

Shammah came next. He was a worldly sophisticate, he had custom clothes and fancy jewelry. He had the air of cultural superiority because he had seen the world. Shemmah was the next obvious choice, and the Holy Spirit says, nope.

All seven sons come before Samuel, and he says to Jesse: “Hey, Jesse, is this everybody?” And Jesse says, “Yep that’s all, all of my sons... except there is one, the youngest, he’s with the sheep.” Verse 11 uses the word *haqqaton*, and in the Hebrew translation, this word could mean youngest, or it could mean “the smallest” or “the insignificant one,” “the runt.”

“You couldn’t possibly mean that one, Samuel.” And Samuel says, “We’re going to leave that to God. Because this meal won’t start until I meet this kid.” So they go and they bring back the one, and he goes before Samuel and the Lord says, “That one, that’s the one. Arise, anoint him, we have found him, I choose that boy.”

And then in the skill of this narrator, we finally get his name. His name is David. Sixteen chapters and we don’t know his name, but now we learn his name, David—it means *beloved*. Because when Samuel pulls out the oil and anoints his head, the Spirit comes upon David, and for the first time David knows not only the value of his life, but the prospects of his future. You are beloved of the Lord, David.

So how much is this overlooked boy worth? Don’t measure David by his pedigree; measure David’s worth by the metric of God’s love, the God who would choose him.

This is my first point. God doesn't choose by popular vote. It isn't what we've got going for us on the outside, or the credentials that accompany us, or the physical stature that carries us. Getting called into God's action isn't based on ability or our perceived *upsides*. What the call of David says to us is that the worldly tools we use to judge people may not even be a part of the equation for God.

This is why being a Christian means that we take a leveled view of national and local elections. Leadership in God's kingdom doesn't arise using the same metric. The powerful, the successful, the well-groomed aren't always God's choice. Because the heart of a person and the content of their character isn't so obvious to the outside world. It takes a deeper look.

The Apostle Paul captures this evaluation beautifully in 1 Corinthians 12 when he says: **Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.**

God uses plain folks like Samuel and David all the time. The undistinguished, the socially suspect, ordinary women and men, *Les Miserables* (the miserable ones)... in other words, just about everyone who has ever lived. And by this metric, no one is disqualified from doing God-sized things in the Kingdom. All it takes is the patience to wait and the humility to trust.

Last Monday, I had a great day planned: drop Christian off at Preschool, take care of a few housekeeping items in the office, then fly off to Marion for a glorious day of seclusion in the library—or as I call it the *nerdery*. But as you can probably guess, God had other plans. Not long after arriving, I received a phone call from someone who I had crossed paths with the week before—they were looking for assistance in the form of gas to get them to a doctor visit. Here at WPC, we provide assistance to our community through gas vouchers—incidentally, if you would like to help with that program, it would be most welcomed.

As we spoke, the conversation shifted from their lack of fuel to something more real. I heard the stories of someone who had experienced 100 lifetimes worth of pain and hardship. As I listened, it was becoming clear to me God was trying to get my attention. I just didn't know for what purpose.

After hanging up the phone, I headed off and got as far as Penguin Point before I thought, "This is silly. I'll get there, then turn around an hour later." When I got back to the office, this woman was there speaking to Kari. Shortly after Kari left, this 50-something woman and I continued our conversation, in which she poured out her heart and gave me the opportunity to pour out mine.

"I went through something difficult recently, too," I said. And as I began to share my story, tears came to my eyes. The first tears I'd shed in weeks. I found myself being ministered to in my own office by someone who had come looking for our assistance—how's that for flipping the script? If we are willing to give God reign, the Holy Spirit will turn our metrics, turn our assumptions about power and influence upside down.

Just like he said to Samuel, God was impressing upon me: **Do not look on appearance; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.**

Here we come to the second point. God calls all of you to the ministry of grace and mercy and forgiveness, not just the pastors, not just the priests, not just the elders and deacons.

David is a prime example of what Martin Luther once coined “the priesthood of all believers.” There are all sorts of roles in the church—prophet, priest, wise person, elder, apostle, deacon, bishop, but throughout the Bible, the primary emphasis is on *the people*.

When Christian communities like ours are healthy, the little ones, the often overlooked ones, those of meager estate aren’t shuffled into “the program,” but are heard, free to take initiative, and know that they are just as called and gifted as the elders, the deacons, and the pastors. And in that way, we all minister alongside one another.

Who, in your week, was that priest in plain clothes? Was there a moment—perhaps skipped over in the busyness of your day—that God sent one of his undercover ministers to you? Did you recognize it?

As I stood in my office looking across at someone who was, by many accounts, an unseen, easily overlooked person, I realized that this woman was standing at her post, performing her sacred duties of ministering to her neighbor, the person God had put before her.

Author and scholar Timothy George captures this in one beautiful sentence: “Every Christian is *someone else’s* priest, and we are all priests *to one another*.”

In Luke 7, Jesus sat in the home of a professional religious person, a Pharisee, someone who prided himself on knowing all sorts of stuff about God. I can imagine sitting at the table with him, there was no shortage of posturing and pontificating. But it was a local woman who fell at Jesus’ feet confessing and breaking a costly vessel of oil over him and anointing him with her tears who ministered to Jesus. **You did not give me water for my feet, no kiss, you did not anoint my head, but since I entered she has not stopped ministering to me.**

It’s easy for us to overlook people, overlook moments, overlook possibility in our day. We are too busy, too stimulated, too sleep-deprived, too malnourished, and too distracted. It’s worse than any other time in history. And it’s easy for us to forget the God who saves us, miss the God who is with us, because our gaze is pointed in the wrong direction. We need a Samuel, someone who has the sensitivity of spirit to let God pull back the curtains and reveal his purposes. We also need to cultivate our inner David to have the courage to respond when God looks at us and says, “You’re the one.” “For this moment, in this place, at this time... you’re the one.” David wasn’t looking for the job, but when the job came to him, he said, “Here I am.”

I got an email from our church office manager Kari this Thursday that caused me to stop and ponder this passage from a new vantage point—turn the gem, if you will. “Interesting that it says God does not look at outward appearance” yet vs. 12 tells us “Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome.”

Scripture tells us that God didn’t look at David’s outward appearance—doesn’t mean that he didn’t have beauty. It just means that it took more sensitivity, more patience, for that beauty, that ruggedness to come through. You can imagine how easy it would have been to look past him and

see his more impressive older brothers. But it's often in the least expected places where we see the Spirit most present.

Moms, you teach us lessons like don't judge a book by its cover, treat others like you'd want to be treated, choose honesty and integrity over popularity. Because you are the champions of those small gestures that have momentous meaning. Thank you for your priestly wisdom, as you mediate God's grace to us in the drive through, the check out, and the dinner table.

Many of you have forgone professional titles and five year plans to nurture the least of these in our world. Changing diapers, arranging for rides, packing lunches, and keeping the family calendar are just a few examples of how you minister to your children. And for this we honor you. And for those of you moms who have the skill and energy to be both mom and full time professional person—living one life is challenging enough, I can safely say that you live enough for two. And do it all because you care for those who you're responsible to provide for.

Moms—like the Priests of Israel who presided over an altar with sacrifices of meat and grain and drink—you preside over a different kind of altar, the family altar where table graces and meals of meat and grain and drink become the place where God's blessing and God's plan unfolds.