

Sunday, March 19, 2023 – Fourth Sunday in Lent

First Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

1, 4 - 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 did what the LORD commanded and came to Bethlehem.

This is not grieving like over the death of a spouse or a child – after which life is never again the same. Rather it is grieving over something that did not work out as I had hoped. When have you done that kind of grieving – like Samuel's grieving over Saul? When have you needed to "fill your horn with oil and set out"?

6-7 - When (the sons of Jesse) came, (Samuel) 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."

When have you evaluated people or situations in terms of how they looked from the outside? When have you needed to look at people or situations as God sees them?

10-12 - 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 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." He sent and brought him in.

12-13 - 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.

Psalm: Psalm 23

1 - "The Lord is my shepherd"

In David's day, as well as at the time of the birth of Jesus, being a shepherd was an occupation that was looked down on. When Samuel, who had come to Bethlehem to anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be king, asked whether all the sons were present, Jesse replied, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." (1 Samuel 16: 11) Later, when David went to visit his older brothers who were in the army, his oldest brother Eliab asked him, "Why have you come here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness?" (1 Samuel 17: 28)

David took an occupation that was looked down on and gave it dignity and value by using that image to describe his relationship with God. Reminds me of when the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "So whatever you do, do everything to the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10: 31)

3 - "He restores my soul"

There were many reasons why David's soul needed to be restored. After his sin with Bathsheba the prophet Nathan told him, "The sword shall never depart from your house" (2 Samuel 12:

10), which turned out to be painfully true. Son Amnon raped daughter Tamar, whereupon son Absalom murdered Amnon. After stealing the hearts of the people, Absalom stole the kingdom from his father, whom he publicly humiliated, and then eventually met his death after his short-lived rebellion.

David experienced unimaginable sorrow, as the prophet Nathan told him he would. But still God called him a man after God's own heart. (1 Samuel 13: 14) His soul was also restored in the birth by Bathsheba of Solomon, who would build the Temple that David had wanted to build and would be the ancestor of Joseph, the legal father of Jesus.

4 - "Your rod and your staff – they comfort me"

David was confronted by a wise woman from Tekoa for refusing to reconcile with his son Absalom. He was also confronted by the prophet Nathan regarding his sin with Bathsheba. "You are the man!" Nathan had said. (2 Samuel 12: 7) Realizing the greatness of his sin, David experienced the greatness of God's mercy and wrote a most powerful psalm of repentance. "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your steadfast love; according to Your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions." (Psalm 51: 1)

Second Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14

8 - Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light.

Gospel: John 9:1-41

1-3 - As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."

For the disciples there were only two possible explanations for the man's being born blind. Either he sinned or his parents sinned. Jesus said it is not so simple.

Cf. Jesus re death of Lazarus in John 11: 15 – "For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe."

Andre Crouch's song "Through It All" – "For if I'd never had a problem I'd never know that God could solve them. I'd never know what faith in his word could do."

6-7 – (Jesus) spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

14 - Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.

16 - Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided.

Today as well people are very divided in their view of and response to Jesus.

24-25 – For the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."