

Seeing the heart of the Matter
Jubilee Mennonite Church
March 26, 2017

Purpose: To explore the dynamic of our vision of good versus and alongside God's vision of our true identity.

Message: We are invited to surrender our limited sight of others, of ourselves, and embrace the fact that the God who created us in his image loves us still.

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 16:1-13 (I will read); Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14 [please read/have read as supplement]; John 9:1-41

Synopsis: With the millions of images that flash before our eyes each day, there is little wondering how we can become somewhat blind. We are shown time and again the way things SHOULD BE: the house, the smiling family, the picket fence, 2.2 kids. We each carry this image of how our life ought to be, and we spend a great deal of time inquiring how we might find it, matching our ambitions to those of the image of should.

While some of this is good, right and proper (we do need some goals and images of where we would like to be), we are also invited to catch a second glimpse in the mirror and see how God sees the world, and each one of us: as the beloved creations, children each of his care. God sees as we are, and for who we are, and even when there is that which separates us from God, God's love for us remains unchanged. We are invited to see again through God's eyes, knowing the world, ourselves, and all people through the eyes of love.

1 Samuel 16:1-13

The YHWH 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 YHWH.'
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 YHWH'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 YHWH does not see as mortals see;
they look on the outward appearance,
but YHWH 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,
"YHWH 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.

YHWH 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.

Seeing is believing, or so the old trope goes. We put a great deal of faith into that which is right before our eyes. It is the evidence that we trust the most because it is the way that most of us encounter the world. Digital manipulations aside, the notion of how a picture tells a thousand words remains apt; the evidence to contradict what we see, or what we thought we saw has to be fairly compelling to convince us that our first glance proves false.

It is always a game of glances too. We pride ourselves on our ability to size somebody up in short order. With the right costume, notion of who is who and context of where we are, we become pretty convinced that we can read a situation, who is a threat and who is not. Yet we know on a fundamental level that these are superficial evaluations that tell us not a great deal about who we are dealing with. I have long been a resister against the notion that the clothes make the man. In college I sported my shoulder length hair, generally in a pony tail that looked something of the backend of a squirrel, be faded flannels, over a t-shirt and jeans. It was my grunge period, and part of my notion that it really shouldn't be all that important how one looks to play the part. I have spent hours arguing with professors, friends, and most of all my parents about the irrelevance of dress. We spend so much time negotiating our way into our children's heads with the message that they are good and loveable and wonderful for who and what they are, only to turn right around and tell them to get a haircut and clean themselves up least someone figure out whose kid lurks beneath the muck. It is a bit of mixed message. A just a note here for the younger members of the audience: I might advise you against pointing out this hypocrisy. I have tried it. It generally only draws exasperated looks and rather ominous rumbling about living on their roof and paying rent. It's not a terribly good place to be.

As much power as the power of the first impression has on us, our world, where it has most power is ultimately within ourselves. We have been given role models by the dozen in our media saturated culture. We would not struggle to outfit the role when and as we are given it. If I say preppy, what comes to mind? Some polo shirts, carefully pressed shirts and some loafers to seal the deal. Skaters have their outfit, as does Goth, middle class, working class, and all the rest. As much as we would like to think that we have left the characterizations of High School well behind us, we know that they are often alive and well within us, defining who we are, sometimes whether we actively chosen them or not. Our perceptions, our judgments are very important to

us, both those which we use to evaluate others and those that others impose to evaluate us. We all play the game to some degree, and we have all been victims of this same game to one extent or another. But the most powerful perception is the image we hold of our selves, and who we KNOW ourselves to be if for no other reason that people have told us that this is who we are so many times.

But this vision, and these images, must never be confused with our full and final appearance: the persons we are in the sight of God. It should come as no surprise to see even the prophet of God in Samuel falling back on to these elemental assumptions in his task of calling a new king to serve the people of Israel. This seems like such an old story, out of place and time, but when we hear its message, we know that it is true. Saul, despite still physically occupying the throne, had demonstrated himself to be unfit as a ruler of the people of by his actions in battle and before God. Samuel had declared as much at his parting with Saul. Samuel was now on a casting call to select a new king. This was much more than just a political selection to be made, this is a reflection of relationship between YHWH God and the people. Saul had been selected, the text indicates, because ‘there were none like him in all the people.’ He was unsurpassed in stature, handsomeness, beauty—the type of person you expect to have a little glint of light bounce off his white teeth every time he smiles. But these are not the attributes that make a good King, and God knows it. The measure of the one who was called to lead, called to be part of God’s plan is not the natural physical attributes that are readily apparent and easily judged. It is the heart, the soul that creates the king, an attribute that cannot be voted on, evaluated, or assessed by simple human sight.

In order to fulfill his mission, to continue what God is doing in the world, Samuel must apply a different vision, take on new eyes, God’s eyes for the task of anointing a king. It’s tricky because it does not come naturally. We want what we want, even if it may not always be the right thing, All of the natural choices, the oldest, the tallest, the smartest, the prettiest, the ones to whom the power in this family naturally belongs, the ones to whom Samuel turns first with his evaluation of the attributes he sees. Yet, when Samuel allows the eyes of YHWH God to work in him and through him, that he comes to a very different conclusion and finds the one that God had in mind from the first; the one at the bottom the one who is so inconsequential that he did not

even merit being brought along. Yes, as the author notes, David was exceptional in the traditional senses of beauty as well, but it is worth noting that it is these attributes of beauty that get him into the most trouble first Saul and eventually as king. Samuel was called to look differently, to look beyond the superficial human standards, the readily evident qualifications of success and power, and to look more with eyes of faith, eyes of hope, eyes of promise, eyes of God that does not merely gaze at the outside, exterior aspects of the individual, but knows the whole person, the whole story, and the whole promise of each life and each heart, even when that heart proves complicated and hard to maintain as the true image of the leader that God wants. David, imperfect as he was, reflected the intent to be about the true work of kingship—seeking the will of God and well being of the people to the best of his abilities.

Lent is a time for stepping aside and looking in the mirror. We are on this journey with Jesus, accelerating toward Good Friday, trusting and anticipating that Easter joy that follows. But right here, right now, we are invited to look again at who and what we are. Not just the easy glimpses of who we are told that we are, or who we have been so many times that we actually have come to believe it. But who we are in the vision and sight of the God who made us, who loves us, and who calls us into being all that we are invited in grace to be. Because sometimes believing is seeing. We believe and we are called to look again with new eyes, with new sight, with new hope, and to see again the unexpected, unplanned, incredible things that God is doing in the world and in our lives. We are invited to see the kingdom coming not with the jaded eyes of the world who have already seen too much, know too much weariness, and predictable outcomes. We are called to look with new sight and see God's provision for our every need. We are called to look with new sight that dwells not on the surface impracticalities and impossibilities of the world, but to look past what appears to be, and to see the way that God sees.

We look differently and see that no person, no matter how ugly, how bent, how dirty, how sinful, is beyond the love and grace of God. We see with new eyes and behold that there is no situation no matter how twisted, how unjust, how warped, that is beyond the redeeming hope of the kingdom coming. We receive new sight and find that there is no place of the soul so dry, so barren that God cannot and will not cause to bloom yet again, turning weeping into dancing.

We look with new eyes, eyes of faith, and see that all things are possible through the God that judges not the exterior reality, but the heart of the matter, and the heart of the love that holds all in its tender care, even that which we least like to look at in ourselves. We see the hope a new heaven and a new earth, and see God's ongoing action and ongoing provision for our every need, and friends, what a sight it is.

We need to journey into new sight, and different sight that sees not the lack, not the impossibility, but the possibility of God's loving revolution that is underway all around us. This is a challenge for us individual to claim our new sight, our new eyes, and this is a challenge for us as a congregation to look again for the vision that God is revealing to us for our future. With what eyes are we going to see: the eyes of the world with its limited evaluation, or the eyes of God through which all things are possible?

But how hard it is to do this, to see differently. Our lenses are so clouded with the expectations of the ordinary that we struggle to squint through and catch a glimpse of the truth beneath. Often, the hardest work is to release what we know to be our own selves to catch a glimpse of the beloved daughter worth saving, the son who is long sought after. It needs practice. It needs focus. It requires us to release our first sight and be who we are most deeply are—the beloved children of a loving God.

Introduce Mirrors

May we each be given the faith to see what we most need a glimpse of—the love that God holds for each one,