

Samuel Was the Search Committee 1 Samuel 15:34-16:15

June 17, 2018

Please pray with me. Dear God, we confess that instead of putting our trust in you, we often want to know the outcome before we say yes to the invitation. Grant us the courage to answer your call and help us to remember you have chosen us for something special. Amen.

So, how many of you folks have ever been on a search committee? It is not easy is it? Over my lifetime I have held many lay leader positions – communion steward, chair of the women’s fellowship, parish pastor relations committee, mission committee, deacon, but never have I served on a search committee. I have been on the other side, being interviewed by a search committee though, both here and at other churches when my profile was circulating before I was called here.

Before you interviewed me for the interim position you had done no small amount of work and as important as that meeting was – I only remember fleeting parts of it. I drove up and had no idea where to park of course. Malcolm was standing at the door with a cooler, waiting for someone with a key and I had no idea who Malcolm was – rather unnerving to say the least for someone who was used to being pretty much in control of life. And, the only question I can remember was one that our beloved Carl Anderson asked. “Do you plan to continue on and become ordained?” Oh yes, and the skies opened up and it poured during the meeting and was still pouring when I left – Jim offered me a tablecloth to cover my head, but I just ran for it. Don’t get me wrong. Everyone was friendly and

welcoming, but search committees have a difficult job and prospective ministers have an equally difficult job. And this is only to decide on a minister, not a king.

Now we must remember that the Israelites have been pestering God for a king for a long time. All of the countries around them have a king and they just feel inferior – only having God whom no one can see. Prior to today's scripture passage, Samuel has anointed Saul as king of the Israelites at God's behest and has informed Saul what the Lord demands of him as the king. However, Saul just can't bring himself to obey the Lord's commands, perhaps because of his compassion and this infuriates God. Consequently, Saul finds himself delegitimized as the king. Samuel is still grieving over this when the Lord sends him to Bethlehem where one of Jesse's sons will become the next king, but Samuel does not know which one will be the one chosen.

Imagine how easy this is compared to what you went through to find a new minister! Samuel didn't have to build a profile complete with demographics of the town. He didn't have to decide what attributes were most important – did they want a king who was a great orator? Did the king need to be compassionate to his subjects? Did the king have to be handsome? No, all Samuel needed to do was listen to the voice of God and anoint God's chosen one. Now we know that prayer is a part of search committee meetings, but I wonder how often committees look at the attributes God would look at. I wonder if they don't sometimes choose based on looks, age, experience and degrees and no doubt they do so with the best intentions in mind and the interests of the church at heart. They don't have the ability to look into a person's heart as God can do.

This passage is about being chosen by God for a particular purpose. According to the social rules of the time, David was not entitled to be king, but God doesn't work according to the social rules of man. And, as we read the passage we see that God doesn't look at outward appearances, but what is written on the heart. God looks at his children in a different way than we look at each other. And another thing, God gave each of us gifts, gifts he expects us to use to make the world a better place. We each have different gifts, but all of these gifts are definitely important to the world around us.

Today's text from 1 Samuel invites us to learn a few things. One of them is to be aware of our natural tendency to be biased toward people one way or the other based on their looks. But an even further point is that trying to avoid this bias is not just smart behavior, it is also a religious matter. If we are trying to be followers of Jesus, then we ought to work at looking past a person's physical appearance. We ought to do our best to look at what is in another person's heart.

The text also invites us to learn a different meaning of beauty. Saying that God looked on David's heart and found him worthy to be the next king is a way of saying that even though David was a good-looking man, his real beauty was at the heart level. The Navajo tribe is said to use the word beauty to designate the beneficial alliance between spirits and nature. While the traditional Navajo faith is not Christian, Christianity can understand that way of using the word. Jesus told the Pharisees that cleaning the inside of the cup (that is, their hearts), would result

in a clean outside. That is a way of saying that they would then reflect God's beauty.

And in fact, Christianity does use a form of the word beauty in much the same way. The root word for beauty is the also the root for the word "beatitude." The beatitudes are the statements of Jesus that begin "Blessed are those ..." and go on to talk about states of spirituality, such as "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness...." So we can see that in God's eyes there is true beauty in the spiritual state of a humble person who is sincerely seeking righteousness.

Yet one more thing this story from 1 Samuel invites us to learn is about the moral nature of God. Frankly, we don't know why God made some of us better looking than others of us or why he made us so that we are able to prefer certain physical attributes over others, but it raises our confidence in the moral nature of God to know that when God looks at each of us, he sees our hearts and is not misled by our appearances. Abraham Lincoln, who was not particularly handsome himself, is quoted as saying, "The Lord prefers common-looking people. That is the reason he makes so many of them."

For those of us who are not candidates for a Miss America competition or for a Hunk-O-Mania revue, that is good news, but it's also good news for those who are. For it is only at the heart level where an extreme makeover is really possible and where with God, real beauty counts. And in the case of that kind of makeover, we aren't expected to be able to do it ourselves. Instead, God calls us to trust him to make us new — beautiful and new.

Let us go forth into the world to serve God with gladness; be of good courage; hold fast to that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honor all people; love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.