

13.06.21: 1 Samuel 15:34 – 16: 13 - The Lord Looks on the Heart by Rev Lin Vawer

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you,
O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. **AMEN.**

Today we live in a world where much emphasis is placed on outward appearance. A high priority is placed on what we look like, what we wear has a high priority and the saying "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" doesn't hold the same comfort any longer. Among many, there is a certain shame about not only growing older but looking older and botox and the like is big business.

In our reading today, God turns all of that on its head with just a teensy bit of one verse: "*the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.*" So what is it that the Lord is seeing that is going to make such a difference to the future of Israel. To understand that we have to take a step back. In the first book of Samuel, outward appearances are noted from time to time.

Last week we heard how after several hundred years of being led by judges and prophets under God's guidance, the people asked Samuel to choose a king for them so that they could be like the nations around them, with a strong leader to fight their battles. So Samuel chose Saul son of Kish, and it's recorded of him that he was a whole head taller than anyone else in Israel at the time. People were impressed! Here was a man who could lead them in their battles against the Philistines! And at the beginning Saul did well. He led well. He was wise. He fought battles and they were won.

But then Saul changed. He started to disregard God, disobey him. His commitment to God was at best Luke warm and at worst self-seeking rather than God seeking. He just lost that whole-hearted and w commitment to doing God's will, having power, and staying in power, became more important to him. So when, Samuel is told that Saul has gone to Carmel to set up a monument to himself he really seals his fate as King.

God rejects Saul as king of Israel. It doesn't happen straight away. His successor will finally take the throne. A flower does not die as soon as it's plucked; if you put it in water and feed it, you can make it last a long time. But essentially it's doomed as soon as you pluck it, and that's what's happening to the reign of Saul. God's heart isn't in it anymore; he's looking for a successor.

So we pick up the story today. God tells Samuel to go down south to Bethlehem and choose a successor for Saul. God tells him to tell the people of Bethlehem that he's come to offer a sacrifice, and he's to specifically invite the family of Jesse, because God has chosen one of Jesse's sons as the new king. And this is exactly what Samuel does. The people are gathered around, the sacrifice has probably been offered, and then, one by one, the sons of Jesse are presented 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" (1 Samuel 16:7)."

Seven sons are paraded, perhaps he begins by looking for a clone of Saul - tall, handsome, impressive looking - but God doesn't give any of them the nod. Samuel must have been so confused! "Is this all of them? Surely there must be another one?" "Well, actually, there is", Jesse replies; "There's the youngest one, but he's off looking after the sheep". "Bring him in", Samuel says. So they send for David, and when he arrives, the author can't resist making a comment about his outward appearance!

"Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome."

This description of the extraordinary good looks of David comes hot on the heels of a warning to all of us that we too readily look on the outward appearance while God looks on the heart. It would have made far

more sense at this point in the story if David had been described as a swarthy, broken-nosed toad, not worthy of a second glance. But no! He is a bombshell of a man whose beauty will be known far and wide in the land.

Here he is. David fresh faced, energetic, ready for anything. It was when he was anointed that the stuff of Kings happens: "*the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him,*" and the leadership is sealed.

So God has found a man whose heart is in the right place. Does this mean that David never falls short, and never sins against God? We know it does not. We've got his story in the first and second books of Samuel, warts and all. There are moments of faith and devotion, and moments of great wickedness. The devotion of David's heart doesn't mean that he never fails; he does, sometimes spectacularly. But his response is well expressed in one of our baptismal promises: 'Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?' That's what David does.

So what does this passage have to say to us today, in the very different world that we live in? I think that for many of us, the 'outward appearance' we're not impressed with tends to be our own. When we think of the possibility that God might be calling us to some ministry, we compare ourselves with the best ministry people we know, and then we think, "I could never do what they do! They've got theological degrees and oodles of training; they're gifted speakers, friendly and outgoing, oozing self-confidence and leadership ability. Clearly, I'm not in their league!"

If we just think about the original twelve apostles; they weren't exactly oozing theological education or leadership ability! Peter is always putting his foot in his mouth or promising things he can't deliver; James and John want to call down fire from heaven on Samaritan villages, and they've got their eyes on the top jobs when Jesus takes over in Jerusalem; Thomas is full of doubts; Simon the Zealot has just finished a promising career as a terrorist working against the Roman government, and Matthew was a tax collector in the pay of the Roman government! Clearly, as our text says, '*for the LORD sees not as man sees;*'

So this is the first thing we learn: don't count yourself out, and don't count other people out either, because of first impressions or outward appearance. This is not what God is looking for. God is looking deeper.

The second thing we learn is what God is looking for. What are the essentials? God is looking for is a faithful and obedient heart. Nowadays when we use the word 'heart' we tend think of the feelings, the emotions, but that's not what the Bible writers meant. For them, the heart meant the will - the choices we make, and the actions that come from those choices. To love the Lord with all your heart means to make a decision to live your life according to God's will. That is what God was looking for when he chose David.

So this is the big thing God is looking for when he's trying to find someone to do a job for him: someone who is doing their best to put the teaching of Jesus into practice in their daily lives. It starts at our baptism when we are all initiated into ministry in Christ's church. All of us are important leaders in some way, all of us have a different function. And we can do it! We can do it because:

Where we are not able, God will enable us.

Where we are weak, God will make us strong.

Where we are uncertain, God will give us the certainty we need

Where we are weary, God will encourage us.

People look on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. A heart that's obedient to him a life that is filled with his Spirit. May he find what he's looking for today, here in our church. Amen.