

This morning, let's look at a story from the Old Testament. But first, let me give you some background: Moses had led the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt across the wilderness to the Promised Land. Following the death of Moses, Joshua led the Israelites in the conquest of the Promised Land. Then as the people settled into their new land, God raised up judges to lead and guide this young nation. The most famous judge was Samuel. But the people of Israel were not satisfied with his leadership and their unique privilege of being the chosen people of God; they wanted to be just like everybody else. Instead of a heavenly Father, they wanted an earthly king to lead them and to win their battles. Samuel warned them that they didn't know what they were asking for. With a king they would be taxed, forced to serve in the military, and made slaves to the king. But they didn't listen to Samuel or to God, and so God granted them their wish. You remember the old saying "be careful what you wish for."

So God selects Saul, a great warrior, as the first king of Israel. At first, Saul walks with the Lord and is successful and a good king, but like a lot of people when they get into power, it went to his head and he drifted from the Lord. He disobeys God's commands and thus falls out of favor with the Lord. God realizes that Saul is no longer the right man for the job, and tells Samuel to inform Saul that another person has been chosen to lead Israel.

This is where our story picks up this morning in Chapter 16 of 1 Samuel, verses 1-13. It is the story of a young shepherd boy who becomes the most famous and beloved king of Israel – King David. God tells Samuel to go to Bethlehem to find the new king. Do you see the significance in this? Centuries later wise men will also come to Bethlehem searching for a new king – the true King, Jesus Christ, but that's another sermon.

Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13

God tells Samuel that He has chosen one of Jesse's sons to replace Saul as the King of Israel. Now at first this does not seem like a difficult task. After all Samuel has done this before when he had previously anointed Saul as king. But on closer examination, it gets more complex. For one thing, Saul is still king and he is a very jealous man; thus Samuel fears for his life. And then there is the problem that Samuel does not know exactly who he is looking for, which son is it? But Samuel takes a leap of faith and follows God's instructions without knowing all the facts. He trusts that God will show him what to do when the time comes.

So led by the Spirit, Samuel goes to Bethlehem and invites Jesse and his sons to come and make a sacrifice to the Lord with him. Samuel starts evaluating Jesse's boys to see which one God has chosen. He remembers the characteristics of Saul that had made him a likely candidate for being a king – big, strong, a head and shoulder above other men. When Samuel sees Jesse's oldest son he immediately thinks that this is the one because he is tall and handsome. But God

tells him: “Looks aren’t everything. Don’t be impressed with his looks and stature. I’ve already eliminated him. God judges people differently than humans do. Men and women look at the outward appearance, God looks into the heart.”

As each son is presented to him, Samuel feels confident that he is the one. But one after another, God reminds Samuel that while these men may have the outward appearance of a great king, God chooses based on a different set of criteria. God chooses based on what’s in a person’s heart. After examining seven of Jesse’s sons, Samuel is confused that not one of them was the chosen one; so he asks Jesse: “Is this all of your sons?” Jesse tells him that he has one more son, the baby who is out tending the sheep; so they send for him.

When David arrived, he looked nothing like his brothers. He did not look like a mighty warrior – big and strong. Instead he was smaller and freckled face. When Samuel looked at David, he saw a rough, young shepherd boy. However, he could not see what God saw: David’s heart and character. From outward appearances, David was ordinary, average; however, on the inside he was far from it. He did not look like the kind of man that God would choose as king, but he was. On that day Samuel anointed David, the small, ruddy shepherd boy, as the king of the chosen people of the Lord. And as we know, he would become the greatest of all the kings of Israel.

Looks can be deceiving. For example, early one morning, a woman made a mad dash out of her house when she heard the garbage truck pulling away. She was still in her bathrobe. Her hair was wrapped in big curlers. Her face was covered with sticky cream, and she was wearing an old beat-up pair of slippers. In short, she was a frightful sight. When she reached the sidewalk, she called out: “Am I too late for the garbage.” “No,” replied the driver, “hop right on in!”

God’s standards are different from our standards. Most of our choices as humans are based on what is on the outside. We judge things by how they look. The mass media today encourages this faulty outlook by using glamorous people in advertisements, television, and printed materials to such an extent that ordinary-looking people don’t seem to measure up to the world’s standard. However, when you go and buy a car, I hope you don’t just look at the color and the exterior. You need to look under the hood and check out the engine and see how it runs, kick the tires. In the same way, God looks inside and sees how we run, what drives us. When God measures a person, He puts a tape around their heart, not their head.

In the Bible, the term heart refers to the “inner person” or the place where one thinks and reasons. It is a metaphor for a person’s spiritual core. It refers to who the person really is; their soul and mind – their feelings, desires, passions, thoughts, and understanding. It has to do with the will and character of a person; it has been described as “the place of conscious;” the place where God turns.

Isn't it reassuring that unlike the world around us, God judges us based on what is inside us – our heart, thoughts, motives, attitudes, who we really are – and not on our physical appearance or skills? When so many are fooled by appearances, it is comforting and encouraging to hear that God looks at the heart, that God sees past the preoccupation with image and appearance that characterizes our modern time. God even chooses those of us who may feel like insignificant shepherds like David.

However, when you think about it, this can be both good and bad. The good thing is that we don't have to be perfect, good-looking, talented, successful, or wealthy; thank God! No matter who we are or how we look, we are all worthy of God's love and grace. We may not exactly look the part, but like David, God sees beyond all that is on the exterior to our soul. But just as God sees the inner good, He also sees the inner bad.

And that's the scary part; we can't hide anything from God. We can put on false appearances and a show for other people. We can dress the part of being a Christian, looking religious, righteous and perfect, but God looks below the surface. He sees what is in our hearts, what our true motives are. He knows our inner most thoughts. Psalm 44:21 tells us that "God knows the secrets of the heart." As stated in our Responsive Reading from Psalm 139: "Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it." In other words, we can't hide anything from God. We are only fooling ourselves if we think that we can. We may fool other people, but we can't fool God.

A puzzling robbery took place in one of New York's fashionable apartments. The police could not find any clues as to the identity of the thief until a detective noticed a statute of Jesus turned facing the wall. It yielded one fingerprint that apprehended the crook. The robber later explained that he could not steal with the eyes of Christ looking at him. So he turned the statute around so that he could complete the robbery.

So, if we want to get right with God then we need to start with our hearts. David asks in Psalm 51: "Create in me a pure heart, O God." Are our thoughts pure? Would Jesus approve of our motives, what we think, what we do? But how do we create a pure heart, a heart that God would be proud of? Well, first you must make God the focus of your life. Jesus said it best in Matthew 6:33 – "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all other things will be given you."

And the Apostle Paul gave us some great practical advice in Philippians 4:8 – "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things." Paul understood the influence of one's thoughts on one's life. What a person allows to occupy their mind will sooner or later determine their speech and actions. There's the old saying with computers: "garbage in equals garbage out." We are constantly told that to live a healthy life, we need to watch what we eat.

In the same way, to live a righteous life we need to watch what we feed our minds. Because God knows what we are putting into our minds; thus He knows the condition of our hearts, our spiritual life.

One evening an old Cherokee Indian told his grandson about the battle that goes inside each person. He said: "My son, the battle is between two wolves inside us all. One is Evil – it is anger, jealousy, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, lies, pride, and ego. The other is Good – it is joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith." The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: "Which wolf wins?" The old Cherokee simply replied: "The one you feed." Which one are we feeding?

Because God sees us differently from the perspective of the world, He often chooses the most unlikely characters, ordinary people like you and me to do His will. Just like God saw potential in the young ruddy shepherd boy David, so He saw potential in an 80 year old murderer named Moses, a young queen named Esther, a hard-headed Pharisee named Saul. And then there is Jesus' selection of his disciples. If there was ever an unlikely band of misfits to change the world, this was it.

If Jesus had submitted the resumes of His disciples to a management consultant for their evaluation, here's how today's world would have viewed them. It is the opinion of our expert staff that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education and vocational skills for the project you are undertaking. Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no leadership qualities. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel that it is our duty to inform you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. However, one of your candidates shows great potential. He is a man of ability, relates well with people, has a keen business sense, has contacts in high places, is highly motivated and ambitious. We recommend that you appoint Judas Iscariot as your right-hand man.

Thanks be to God that He does not look at us as the world does, but sees our hearts and our potential. Many of us are unlikely candidates, but God has chosen us for a specific purpose in building His kingdom here in Rio Rancho. As you read further in 1 Samuel, you will see that God was with David all the way and that He gave him the ability to overcome any obstacles that came his way, even the giant Goliath. In the same way, He will be with us and help us overcome our giants. David is but one in a long list of those ordinary persons who God called to do something extraordinary.

So what can we take away from this story this morning that we can apply to our daily lives? Well, first God knows us better than we know ourselves and in spite of that, He still loves and

cares for each one of us. Thanks be to God for His amazing grace! He sees right through our false appearances right to our heart. He wants our hearts, minds and lives to be pure. He knows that we will never be perfect, but He wants us to at least try. If our motives are right, then our hearts will be right. This story also points out that God sees potential in each of us. Our goal should be to find where God wants us to serve, what He wants us to do, and then to live up to what God sees in us. Also if we as the church are to be the channel for God's love and grace to the world around us here in Rio Rancho, we too must seek the heart of God, we must see the world through God's eyes, not our own. May we have the heart and eyes of God. Open the eyes of our heart, Lord! Amen