

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

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11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Samuel 16:1-13

¹The 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." ²Samuel 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 the LORD.'" ³Invite 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." ⁴Samuel 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?" ⁵He 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.

⁶When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the LORD." ⁷But 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." ⁸Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ⁹Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ¹⁰Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." ¹¹Samuel 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." ¹²He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." ¹³Then 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.

Mark 4:26-34

²⁶He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. ²⁸The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. ²⁹But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

³⁰He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? ³¹It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³²yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

³³With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; ³⁴he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

“Ordinary Time & Extraordinary Text”

I don't know if you noticed the designation for this Sunday— Ordinary Time—yes, ordinary time has returned as we are now fully past the Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday movement. There are these months that the liturgical calendar calls Ordinary Time. There was a time when I did not like those words “ordinary time,” but I have to admit that I think most of our life is lived not in the up moments of celebrations, but in that ordinary rhythm of life.

It is appropriate that we represent that liturgically. Today, as Ordinary Time dawns on us we are given these wonderful texts from Mark 4 and I Samuel. The Mark text comprises two parables about seeds growing. The one planted seed grows and produces a harvest. The second story has to do with the mustard seed that when it is sown is tiny but it sprouts, grows, and puts forth branches such that it becomes the greatest of all the shrubs. It grows large branches and the birds of the air can make their nests in those branches.

Then there is that disclaimer that Mark makes in verse 33 & 34: “With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.” I have always been intrigued by that disclaimer that he explained everything to the disciples in private.

Sometimes it is comforting to know that the biblical material needs explaining. Indeed, there are these moments when it feels as if it is more of a riddle than anything. Part of that is because we are reading with our western mind-set that approaches life, comprehension, and conveyance of meaning/understanding in wholly different ways than that of the eastern mind-set.

I dare say, it is not only the parables, but much more of the Bible that can seem both oh so mysterious and oh so real with our lives all at the

same time. These texts are anything but ordinary. They are extraordinary. Such is the case with the story from I Samuel.

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Before I tell you more about the story in I Samuel, let me invite you to truly open your ears and your mind here. I believe, this is one of the primary texts in all of Scripture. I am convinced that this is one of those places in which we see more than what the story simply presents. This is an “extraordinary text.”

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The situation is that Samuel has been grieved over the poor performance of Saul. Saul has not turned out to be the kind of king that the Lord would want to reign over his people. Samuel is not only keen to that reality, but feels it personally. Samuel was the one who had anointed Saul on behalf of the Lord, and Samuel had high hopes for the reign of Saul.

While the story is rich, let it just be said that Saul was a sad disappointment. The voice of the Lord comes to Samuel and tells him to stop being so grieved about Saul as he is ready to anoint the next king. Of course the actual anointing will be done by none other than Samuel performing his priestly duty.

So, the word of the Lord comes to Samuel telling him to go to Bethlehem and there he will reveal to him who is to be anointed. Samuel is a bit hesitant and his very human reality of being fearful about what Saul would do should he hear that he is going to Bethlehem to anoint surfaces. The Lord comforts Samuel by recommending that he go as a worship pilgrimage. Surely, any time that an anointing would happen there would be a festival and sacrifice as part of it—such a pilgrimage would be normal for Samuel in his priestly role.

He goes to of all places—Bethlehem—you will remember that small place will appear later in Scripture as the place where the angels send the shepherds to the one “wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

When Samuel arrives in Bethlehem he makes his way to the clan of Jesse. As he arrives he invited Jesse to gather together his whole family, but especially his sons. It becomes clear that this is no ordinary act of worship and this is no run of the mill sacrifice. This is the doing of God as the Lord is ready to anoint for himself a new king who will reign over the chosen people.

Jesse’s first son, Eliab, passes by Samuel. And as he passes him by, Samuel considers that this is the first born, so surely this would be the one that God would choose. Not only is he the first born, he is also big and strong and powerful—his stature is such that he just wows you as the type of person who would be a king. Of course, it is Eliab.

But, oh, there is that voice of the Lord that comes to Samuel so clearly that says, “No, Samuel. Not him. Do not look on his stature, he is not the one.”

Jesse’s next son, Abinadab, passes by too and Samuel thinks, “He must be the one.” But there is the voice of the Lord again, “No Samuel, not this son either.” So Samuel has to tell Jesse that he is not the one either. Then Sannah passes by, and again—“No Samuel, not this son either.”

And the sons continue to by pass by and the message is still the same. All seven of Jesse’s sons have passed by and none of them is the one. One would think that if it was not the first son then it would have been the seventh son—after all seven is number of completion in the Bible. But no.

Finally, Samuel turns to Jesse and has to ask him, “Are all of your sons here?” And Jesse tells him that they are all there except his young son who was sent to tend the sheep. Now, understand that these other boys, especially the older ones, were developed and ready and looked like kings among men. The youngest son was hardly anything than a farm hand at this point in his life.

Jesse calls for the youngest son to be brought. David appears and he is not big. He is not strong. He is not powerful. He does not look the part. He is little with soft attractive features. And Samuel, looking upon him, hears that voice—“This is the Lord’s. Anoint him.”

Samuel takes the horn of oil and pours it over David. David shall be the king who is reign over all Israel.

This is how God works. One would expect that it would have been the first born. We would expect that it would have been the one who demonstrated the fact that he had strength and might and looked the part. The big, the strong, the powerful, of course that would be and is the one. But, this is not how God works.

One gets the idea that David would not have stood out in the crowd. One gets the clear idea that David was so far down on not only the birth order, but also he was so far down on the pecking order that he is not even invited to the party.

God uses the likes of us. God uses the weak and the ones who do not get picked first. God uses the regular ordinary folks who live on the other side of the tracks. God uses people who live on this side of Route 40. God not only uses them, God picks them. God selects them. God anoints them.

It is us. We are anointed. We are not the glitzy and we are not the glamorous, but God has picked us. God has selected us. God has set us apart. God has chosen to use us in this world and this age. God has set us apart in kingdom of God. God has anointed us.

It is this concept of anointing that seems rather remote. See, it stretches all the way back to the book of Genesis and Jacob's dream. He had propped himself under a rock as a pillow. Then he had that dream of the ladder. It is in that dream that he hears the voice of God saying to him that God is with him and will keep him and will go with him wherever he goes and will bring him back to the land given to him.

In the morning Jacob rises, props up the stone and anoints it with oil naming it Bethel—or literally, House of God. That is the first anointing. It is dedication yes, but it more about being set apart. It is a symbol of being truly set apart.

See the language is important. In Hebrew the word for anoint is messiah—or Messiah. In Greek the word for anoint is quite literally christos—so the term Christ means Anointed One. We tend to use the term Christ as more of a surname for Jesus. No it is a title.

Jesus the Anointed One. When they were crying out for a Messiah—they were asking the one that the Lord would anoint. It makes that sign which was placed on the cross when Jesus was crucified even more poignant. Kings were anointed and Jesus, the Anointed One, -- what did it say, "King of the Jews."

So when we say that we are the Body of Christ. It is more than a designation. It is a title and it is also an assignment. Jesus shows us how the anointed with serve and reign. And it to such a life that we not only invited but anointed into. It has been poured out and over us.

We have been selected by God.

We tend to live the other way. We tend to live such that we think it is about whether or not we will volunteer for what God has to be done. We will give God so much time or we will be generous enough to do this service or this other loving action for God. We think we are making the choice.

Okay. But that is not living into the reality that this is not about us. It is about what God does. See, God has chosen you. In our living the figure of Samuel is the Holy Spirit and we are David. Who would think that it would be us—but as the Spirit comes to us there is this proclamation—“yes, this is the one, anoint them.”

The more we seek to see how God is the author of our lives, the more we live into the authentic being we were created to be. And the more we live into that, the more satisfying, gratifying, and joyful our lives become. Quite literally, nothing else will provide that joy and true peace as does living into our created authenticity. Set apart by God...

When we claim the being set apart by God. When we live into the joy of knowing that it is God doing—God’s will—God’s choice way more than it is ours—oh, then we are living, or at least beginning to live the life God has for us.

Imagine yourself David. Imagine the surprise and the joy to feel that oil running down your face. And now realize that in your baptism, at the

table, even with oil—you are David. You are chosen. You are the Body of the Anointed One—that is extraordinary. So live extraordinary!