

### *David*

Text(s): 1 Samuel 16:1-13 and Psalm 51:1-12  
- Pastor Mike Pancoast

*"The Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance..."*. All good stories work with some element of things being more than they appear, whether it's the fact that Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia turn out to be brother and sister and the love children of Darth Vader, who wasn't always Darth Vader or whether it's the way that the town ne'er-do-wells turn out to be heroes with hearts of gold in Mark Twain's Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer or whether it's the lingering questions one is left with in the Harry Potter series about Severus Snape...DON'T TELL ME!!!

It's the heart of the matter across the board in today's text. The current king Saul--the one that everyone THOUGHT would be an awesome king; the tall, good looking one; the military hero; the one who looks good on camera, so to speak--has turned out instead to be rotten to the core. And so there's going to be a change: however we understand the agency of that change, whether it's a matter of God actively doing something to remove a bad leader or simply allowing the forces of change to chart the course. Saul, who has LOOKED good, has proven instead to be bad.

So with his tools for king making in hand, finest oil for blessing and anointing and a choice heifer for sacrificing, Samuel sets out to find the new king. Samuel knows the king is going to come from Bethlehem, from the family of Jesse but beyond that, the identity of that king is unknown. And so the pageant, the livestock auction begins: first Eliab the Tall...then Abinadab the Handsome...on it went through 5 more brothers, Shimma the Swift...Nethaneel the Smart...and so on. "Surely THIS one must be the Lord's chosen," thought Samuel, but each time came the signal from God: "Keep looking." Remember even Saul LOOKED LIKE the king in the beginning. Even Jesse the Father seems to think that the most likely candidate must be among his oldest, most accomplished sons--David his youngest, the runt who takes care of the sheep while the big boys are taking care of business, seems to be an afterthought.

But it is PRECISELY David who proves to be the one. And even though, I think the human historian recording Israel's history notes that David himself is easy on the eyes (v. 12), it is the contradiction itself that I think might be not just a nugget of wisdom but an invitation to faith. Beyond a warning, perhaps even as we have entered a new political cycle to beware of the one who looks and sounds the best at first blush, there is something deeper, something more profound, something more "Where is God in the midst of every day life?" *The Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.* What if it's not just about judging able leadership? What if this is also an invitation to trust and believe in the good and gracious presence and activity of God IN SPITE OF what we see and think we know and have figured out in the world?

Isn't that what we've heard all along the way as we've even had to if-but-imagine where God is in bringing us all back as a congregation, as individuals, as a community? Childless Abraham and Sarah ... Down-and-out Joseph... Mighty Pharaoh versus two otherwise insignificant Hebrew midwives... Helpless widows in Ruth and Naomi...and yet at every turn, in the midst of their pain and struggle, God is faithful and provides hope and life and light in the midst of darkness. *For the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look only on the outward appearance.* What if this is also an invitation to trust and believe in the good and gracious presence and activity of God IN SPITE OF what we see and think we know and have figured out in the world?

Dear friends in Christ, it's the same message we've heard for the last 4 months, and it's the same message we're going to need to hear for the months to come as we continue to wrestle with what we see and know and experience in our world and community, this invitation to trust and believe in the good and gracious presence and activity of God IN SPITE OF what we see and think we know and have figured out in the world. The valley is still a sordid mess. Our frustration with government officials grows by the day. Perhaps our patience has long since grown thin with being host for those displaced or guest in our hosts' homes. My house is still scattered across three floors, and honestly, sometimes the frustration with being host to the various groups with all their particular needs and requests or when our schedulers book 31 people for space that can only accommodate 16 make me wonder about the benefit of it all, if MY comfort and the ease of MY life is the judge and jury of all things beneficial.

So this word invites me...invites us...to something more, to something different...even if that something more and something different is just to watch and to wait and to listen to where God may be present, even in this mess. Because God IS there. That's the promise of the Word even if I don't see it, and that God is there means that there is also hope and life and light in the midst of darkness because the culmination of all these stories is the story of the cross and empty grave of Jesus. For if God can raise Jesus from the dead, then I think we'll be OK too in the midst of what many of us might call our tombs. Despite what it might look like right now.

There's a second reading here too that we need to keep in sight, as well, and it's that Psalm that the introduction tells us "*David wrote and prayed after he had committed adultery with another man's wife.*" David wasn't a superhero. He was a human being with all the warts and blemishes that we human beings carry in the incurable virus we all carry called sin. A man after God's own heart, mighty in deed and earnest in his devotion to God, yes...but still deeply flawed and subject to the same failings and consequences we all share and suffer. And yet unlike Saul, who seemed to deny and avoid his flaws, failings, and consequences, who continued to try to manage and lie and slug his way out, who never came to seek a return to God as a way to come clean, David eventually always comes back to God, as painful as that may be even to say, "*Have mercy on me...Wash me...I know my sin...*". Who likes to admit they've screwed up, that they've hurt themselves or others? It doesn't get much worse by most reckonings than adultery, and one would think that would be bad enough to dislodge David from his prominence in the story as one through whom God would be at work. But that's the beauty of grace, mercy, and forgiveness that results in new and transformed lives, that provides a way out of the death we expect sin to demand. *For the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look only on the outward appearance.*

Look, I have no idea where or how all this flood business is going to turn out...and certainly not when. There will be times I know I will become tired and angry and frustrated. I know this to be true because it has already happened. And I know it's happening to you too. Because I've heard it and felt it. But I also know that in spite of our failings and shortcomings, God is still present and active even in spite of the outward appearance. And I know this because the Bible tells me so and because I've experienced the gracious presence of God even in the midst of the mess...through the presence of Lutheran Disaster Response volunteer workers who have traveled many miles and hours to work here in our valley...through the generosity of you who have volunteered to feed them... through the flexibility and the good humor of those groups and leaders who have never had to share space here before and for whom now we ALL have share space and patience...through on-going hard work that government leaders, school board members, engineers, bankers and others spend long hours apart from their families and homes in order to engage their expertise in solving problems that are deep, complex, and overwhelming...through synodical and church wide leaders calling us to examine our congregations' roles in the changing reality of our valley.

So, I'm curious about when you have seen God bringing us all back...about where you have seen the gracious presence of God, in spite of the appearance of our valley, our church, our home. It's certainly not as if we pastors are the only ones who can see that presence, and it just may be that we're so absorbed by the church that we are unable to see where God is moving out there in your every day life.