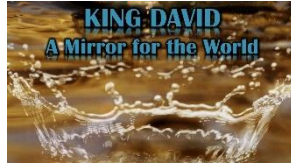
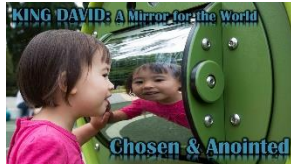


Rev. Joan Pell
Sierra Pines United Methodist Church
Sermon: 07/01/2018
Series: David: A Mirror for the World
Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:1-13



Chosen & Anointed



Today we start a new sermon series looking at the life of King David. David was legendary as a shepherd, giant slayer, warrior chieftain, outlaw, mercenary, lover, poet, musician, political leader and king. His

story is one of rags to riches; yet he is dreaded by his enemies for his brutality, hated by his father-in-law, betrayed by his wife, and his son led a revolution against him. His affair with a married woman led to the murder of her husband. The David we will encounter in these stories is not idealized. *He is both pious and pragmatic, idealistic and self-serving, fearless and calculating.*¹ Yet, all through his life, in all the incredible ups & downs he experienced, David was someone with a passion for God. Yes, he made some terrible mistakes, but, he knew he needed God's grace & forgiveness. And, pleasing God was important to David. We have a huge legacy of songs or Psalms that he wrote that speak to us even today in ways that uplift us, comfort us and challenge us.

So, how did his story start? After Moses led God's people out of slavery in Egypt it was under Joshua that they conquered the Promised Land of Canaan. After that for almost 400 years they had a series of judges or leaders like Deborah, Gideon & Samson. The last judge was the prophet Samuel the nation's spiritual & civic leader. Then the people asked God for a king, like other nations had. So, in about 1050 BCE Saul was anointed by Samuel as Israel's first king. Saul started out well, but sadly did not continue that way. He became proud. Power corrupted him. He did not obey God. Finally, God speaks to Samuel, and tells Samuel to tell Saul, <1 Samuel 15:26> *You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.* And now the story of David begins.

<1 Samuel 16:1-13 The Message>

¹ God addressed Samuel: "So, how long are you going to mope over Saul? You know I've rejected him as king over Israel. Fill your flask with anointing oil and get going. I'm sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I've spotted the very king I want among his sons."

²⁻³ "I can't do that," said Samuel. "Saul will hear about it and kill me."

¹ NIB Vol. 3.

God said, "Take a heifer with you and announce, 'I've come to lead you in worship of God, with this heifer as a sacrifice.' Make sure Jesse gets invited. I'll let you know what to do next. I'll point out the one you are to anoint."

⁴ Samuel did what God told him. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the town fathers greeted him, but apprehensively. "Is there something wrong?"

⁵ "Nothing's wrong. I've come to sacrifice this heifer and lead you in the worship of God. Prepare yourselves, be consecrated, and join me in worship." He made sure Jesse and his sons were also consecrated and called to worship.

⁶ When they arrived, Samuel took one look at Eliab and thought, "Here he is! God's anointed!"

⁷ But God told Samuel, "Looks aren't everything. Don't be impressed with his looks and stature. I've already eliminated him. God judges persons differently than humans do. Men and women look at the face; God looks into the heart."

⁸ Jesse then called up Abinadab and presented him to Samuel. Samuel said, "This man isn't God's choice either."

⁹ Next Jesse presented Shammah. Samuel said, "No, this man isn't either."

¹⁰ Jesse presented his seven sons to Samuel. Samuel was blunt with Jesse, "God hasn't chosen any of these."

¹¹ Then he asked Jesse, "Is this it? Are there no more sons?"

"Well, yes, there's the runt. But he's out tending the sheep."

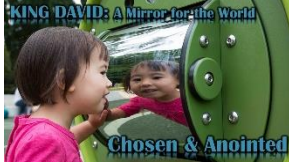
Samuel ordered Jesse, "Go get him. We're not moving from this spot until he's here."

¹² Jesse sent for him. He was brought in, the very picture of health—bright-eyed, good-looking.

God said, "Up on your feet! Anoint him! This is the one."

¹³ Samuel took his flask of oil and anointed him, with his brothers standing around watching. The Spirit of God entered David like a rush of wind, God vitally empowering him for the rest of his life.

Samuel left and went home to Ramah.



I'm sure you all remember the fairy tale Snow White & the 7 Dwarfs. In it the Queen asks *Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of us all?* Children are often fascinated by mirrors. Dogs too, although I suspect they think it is another dog! But adults? Not so much! How about you? Do you like looking in a mirror?

Other than checking your hair or make-up, tying your tie? While the Queen in our fairy tale liked what she saw, we often do not like what we see. Too fat. Too thin. Too tall. Too short. Too many wrinkles. Too big a nose. The wrong shaped ears. Crooked teeth. A terrible haircut. Not many people like to really look in a mirror, deep into their own eyes for a protracted period. It is just too uncomfortable.

But our scripture today teaches us that God does not look at outward appearances. God looks at us in the mirror deeply and as God does so, **God looks into our hearts.** God sees things in us that others do not see, and perhaps we do not see either. **God calls and chooses the most unlikely people.**



The story today reminds me of another fairy tale: **Cinderella.** As the Prince tries to find whose feet fit the slipper, two daughters try the slipper on, but it fits neither. "Do you have another daughter?" asks the Prince.

Samuel goes to Jesse's house. Jesse is not described as "a man of wealth." Jesse's grandmother was Ruth, an immigrant Moabite woman. His grandfather was Boaz, who was descended from the heroic harlot Rahab. Jesse lived in Bethlehem, a small town. So, Jesse was not a prominent man and Bethlehem was not the typical place to find a king. *Of course, it is later the birthplace of Jesus.*

Jesse lines up his seven sons. Samuel looks at the first one and thinks, "Here he is!" But the Lord said to Samuel, "Not this one. Don't look at his appearance or height. I do not look as humans do; I look into the heart." Samuel goes down the row, checking out all seven of Jesse's sons and God says "No" to all of them. Finally the puzzled Samuel asks Jesse, "Do you have any more sons?" "Well," Jesse scratches his head, "There is one more, but he's off watching sheep." "I'll wait," Samuel said. Then this young shepherd boy, named David, enters. He was the last person you would expect to be chosen. The eighth son, a young boy and a lowly shepherd. But God tells Samuel, "That's the one!"

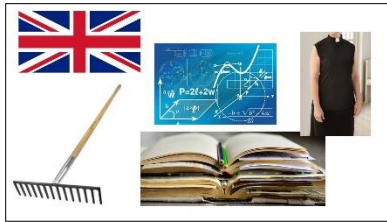


As I was thinking about this, it got me thinking about labels. You see, when Samuel looked at Eliab, (the oldest son) he sees the picture of what he thinks a king looks like. In our minds, when we label people, we reduce them to objects that will serve a purpose in our lives.

Some labels are useful. You are a teacher, you will teach my children. You are a doctor, you will heal my sickness. You are a plumber, you will fix my pipes. Some labels work



like this: You are pretty, you make me feel good. You are popular, you will make me look good. You are powerful, you will help me get what I want. Some labels work like this: You are lazy, you don't deserve help. You are different, you should be cast out. You are the enemy, you should be eliminated.² Some labels work like this: You are ugly and boring. You are crazy and useless. You are overly sensitive and a loser. You'll never be chosen.



I can think of many labels that I have been given. It might be hard to believe now, but I was skinny when I was in lower elementary school or Junior School as we called it in England. There is an English idiom, "as thin as a rake" and my classmates would tease me by calling me a "rake." As a person labelled as British, people in the US expect me to drink English tea, whereas I prefer coffee or herbal tea. Every time I open my mouth, I am labelled as a foreigner. 20 years on, I still cannot go shopping without people asking me where I am from. There was a time in the first few years of living in the US after the children had got their California accents, when they'd say, "Mom, just let us do the talking" as I struggled, especially in Mexican restaurants to be understood. As a mathematician and incredibly logical thinker, I like numbers not words, I'd labelled myself and I never thought that God would call me to ministry and to go to seminary where I'd have to write endless papers. As a woman pastor, even in 2018, people are often expecting a man to walk into the room. *What labels are you walking around with?*



Sadly, there are many people that end up with labels that are just not true, labels that erode their self-esteem or the self-esteem of others. And there are so many labels that are used to artificially divide us. When we label others each person is reduced to an object that can be used and manipulated. As the anti-bullying campaign goes: "Labels are for Clothes"³

Samuel was looking for someone who was tall and strong to make a great king. **David defied the labels that Samuel had for king.** One of the most basic themes of the entire biblical message is that God finds possibilities for grace in the most unexpected places and through the most unlikely persons. To choose David as the future King was to ignore the usual arrangements for power and influence in the ancient world.

This story of the choosing of David can serve as a reminder that we still live in communities for which the patterns of power seek to become permanently entrenched. Too often we fail to look for possibilities of grace and hope beyond the traditional

² Steve Thomason, "Don't Label Me: A Sermon on 1 Samuel 16:1-13" in *Following the Cloud Blog* (October 22, 2013). <https://www.stevethomason.net/2013/10/22/dont-label-me-a-sermon-on-1-samuel-161-13/>

³ <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/river-island-anti-bullying-campaign-30th-birthday-labels-are-for-clothes-stav-strashko-a8200336.html> and <https://www.ditchthelabel.org/>

channels of power, influence, and success. **We ignore the possibilities in those who are customarily absent from the gatherings of power:** those in the inner cities, those living in poverty, the elderly, the young, people of color, the mentally ill, the physically challenged, the non-binary and those who are not straight, immigrants who speak languages other than English, those of a different faith, and oftentimes women.

We tend not believe that God can find hope for a new future **among the marginalized and the dispossessed.** In our own personal moments of estrangement and self-doubt, **we do not believe that God can find possibilities for grace in us.**

God chooses all sorts of people, the most unlikely people. We can be easily misled by outward appearances but God looks into the heart. **It's about character, temperament, wisdom, graciousness, and love.** The one thing that Samuel did have to do, was to listen to God's voice, so he knew whom God had chosen. **Are we listening? Who are we overlooking?**



Last Sunday, those who had been to our Annual Conference Session spoke during our service here. It was the first time Bruce had been to the conference and he came back and told you all about the diversity that he found there. Our annual conference deliberately attempts to have a cross-section of people present. And not just as delegates, but participating in worship and during presentations. You do not just see white, straight, physically-able, older men. You will see people of so many colors, gay and straight, differently-abled, young and old, women and men. *Here is the Young Adult delegation from AC. And it is beautiful.*

I have told you this story before, but it is one of my favorites, so here it is again. Rabbi Yerachmiel gathered the children of the village to him and told them this parable.⁴

“Listen children, listen, for a great mystery is about to be revealed to you.

In the beginning God made a single human from the dust of the earth. This one was red, yellow, brown, black and white, for all the sands of creation were used to fashion it. Male and female it was, for God had not yet separated the sexes. And God said, ‘This one is in My Image, for this one includes all creation in one being.’

God had thought this being would be happy, but it was not happy. It was lonely. So God divided the one human into two, female and male. And then those two divided themselves even further until the unity of the first person was lost in the divisions created by the many people who followed.

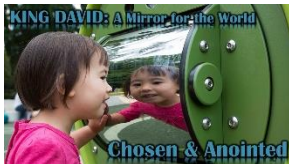
⁴ Elizabeth Roberts & Elias Amidon, Ed., *Prayers for a Thousand Years: Blessings and Expressions of Hope for the New Millenium* (San Francisco: Harper, 1999), 310-311.

And God was saddened by the false divisions. So, God called all the people together and stood them in a great valley. God called each person to stand before a divine mirror in which each person saw reflected not their own image, but the images of everyone else.

Many people were frightened by the strange mirror and ran away to hide. But others understood that God was reminding them of their unity. And these people set for themselves a great task to help each of us see the whole world reflected in each face. God helped them. God took the great mirror and made millions upon millions of tiny mirrors.

God placed these tiny mirrors in the eyes of every human being, even you and me, so that if you look in another's eyes you will see reflected there the whole world and the One who created it.

You are the children of those daring few, and it is time for you to carry on their work: to learn to look into the eyes of another and see the whole world and the One from Whom the whole world flows. If you fail, if you see only yourself reflected in God's mirror, the lie you will live will burn the whole world to a cinder. The whole world is waiting for you, my children. You must see the truth and proclaim it. You must open your eyes and see. And the children looked at each other in awe. Some saw and smiled. Some saw and cried. Some could not see at all. But all held tight, one to another, and God sighed a great sigh of hope."



Are you labelling people? What do you see as you look into someone's eyes? *<Turn and look at your neighbor.>* What do they see as they look into yours? Are you labelling yourself? Take a deep look in the mirror when you get home. We are all God's beloved and chosen people. God sees into your heart, and the beauty that is there. Know that you are precious and don't ever forget that.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

Let us pray... Gracious God of light and love, when we open the scriptures, we often expect to see great examples of faith and works. But we are often disappointed. Instead, we see a mirror, a mirror that shows that most characters in the bible that we laud are often just like us or worse. You called those labelled as unlikely: the youngest, the reluctant, even murderers and adulterers. These flawed personalities became your people. Help us, O God, to see these heroes of the faith exactly as they are, in all of their doubt and failure, and then to realize that we are just as called and equipped as they were when they fully became yours.⁵ Help us especially today and in the weeks ahead to learn from the example of David, a man after your own heart. We pray as the perfect and the imperfect, the righteous and the sinner, in the name of Christ. Amen.

⁵ Adapted from http://www.faithcheyenne.org/_pdfs/2014/July/Sermon%202014-07-06.pdf.

Resources

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