

The Lord Looks On The Heart

Dr. Hmingi Browne



1 Samuel 16:1-13

Our passage today is a critical turning point in the story of faith we are following in the Narrative Lectionary. Israel has joined the nations that have a king. Their first King, the tall and strong King Saul, has broken God's command by keeping some of the spoils of war instead of destroying them as God commanded. The Prophet Samuel, who anointed that very King Saul, has just informed him that God is done with him. And, God has chosen another to be king.

Today we read the story of the shepherd boy, David, revealed to be God's chosen one.

As I read this story I was struck by the words, "the Lord looks on the heart." It is the conclusion of a longer sentence said by God when Samuel thinks the oldest and tallest son of Jesse must surely be the new king.

God says, "the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Yikes!! That is worse than the body scanner at the airport security! (haha)

God chose David to be his Servant/King because of what God saw in David's heart. I wonder what God saw within David's heart? I wonder:

- What did the Lord see in Jeremiah's heart when God called Jeremiah to be a prophet? (Jeremiah 1:4-10)
- What did the Lord see in Mary's heart when God called her to be the mother of Jesus? (Luke 1:26-38)
- What did the Lord see in Levi's heart when Jesus called the tax collector to be his disciple? (Luke 5:27-32)
- What did the Lord see in Philip's heart when he sent him to speak with the Ethiopian Eunuch? And,
- What did the Lord see in the Eunuch's heart when he called him to be baptized? (Acts 8:27-40)

I wonder, also, what it must be like to be chosen not because of outer appearances but because of what is in our hearts. How wonderful it is to be affirmed in our innermost selves by God! How glad I am that the Lord does not look on our tall-ness or good looks! Says this not quite 5'2" person... (haha)

But then I noticed something else. The scripture says that God had "provided" David. Surely that meant God "provided" what was good within the heart of David. That way, God would have a heart-worthy person to be king.

And then, I thought of my father's teaching of our Presbyterian Reformed Faith. He taught me that God lovingly and carefully created each of us with specific gifts and talents. As

we see in Psalm 139, each of us are uniquely and intricately woven by God.

God's love for us is there, even when we sin and run away from what God intended us to be. God shows his great love for us by sending his only son, Jesus, to redeem and restore us to a right relationship with God again.

As one of the Reformers, John Calvin, reminds us - it is through the power of God's love and grace that we are made sisters and brothers of Christ. Because Christ is the true son of God, we become the blessed and adopted children of God.

We Presbyterian Reformed Christians believe that God has a call and purpose for each of us. That call fulfills the deepest and most treasured parts of our hearts. We call this our VOCATION.

David's vocation was to be King of Israel because of who God had created David to be within his heart. The wonderful message of this is that God looks within each of our hearts and sees the gift of who God created

each of us to be. The goodness God has placed in our hearts is the basis of our VOCATION.

John Calvin wanted us to understand that God loves us and finds joy in looking on our hearts.

If I could see the great goodness God has placed within your heart, what would I see?

If you could see the great goodness God has placed within my heart, what would you see?

The test of what is in our hearts is whether it helps us love God and love neighbors.

For instance, as we heard earlier in the service, we can love neighbors by giving new suitcases and pillows to children who are being removed from their abusive homes. This will let them carry their belongings in a new suitcase rather than a garbage bag. I see God and neighbor loved when I see Samaritan Counsellor Diane Brantley, leading our grief support groups.

The question is, does what is in our hearts just stay there? Or does it move us out of ourselves and beyond ourselves to help

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others? My husband, Will, and I pray these words every morning: “Help us, O God, to be your love and grace in word and deed with all we meet today and every day.”

Sometimes, I think, I get a glimpse of what God sees in the heart. I believe I see a glimpse when I see:

- a healer totally focused on diagnosing and relieving another’s pain;
- a musician wrapped in the music and pouring heart and soul into the sound;
- an artist configuring shape and color into beauty and meaning;
- an engineer using math and physics to create something of functional strength and usefulness;
- a teacher guiding a student to find the skills of insight and learning to grow in wisdom and competence; and
- first responders risking themselves to reach and rescue people who are in danger and distress.

I see a glimpse when I am myself being counselled by a Samaritan Counsellor who helps me see my place in God’s larger scheme of things.

And yet, all too often I also see that our hearts get broken and the goodness in the hearts feels lost. But God does not leave us in our brokenness. God does not want the goodness to remain lost.

Will and I recently watched a movie titled, *The Sea of Trees*. It moved me deeply theologically. It is about sin, repentance and redemption. The main character, Arthur, has his already dry and selfish life made worse by the death of his young wife.

Feeling utter despair, he goes to Japan to enter a certain (Aokigahara) forest where, it is said, people go to end their lives. He enters and finds his spot to end his life and begins to take his overdose of pills. He sees another person nearby, who collapses in grief and tears. Disturbed, he goes to help this man named Takumi.

The rest of the movie has to do with their struggle toward and away from death as they listen to each other and rescue each other. In focusing on helping and caring for the other man, Arthur rediscovers the goodness God placed in his heart.

The goodness God put in our hearts is always there. In grace God creates new opportunities for us to be who God intended us to be. God calls us to be generous in giving the goodness of our hearts to others. We are to be as generous as God was to us in the first place.

God does not look on our outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. Thanks be to God!

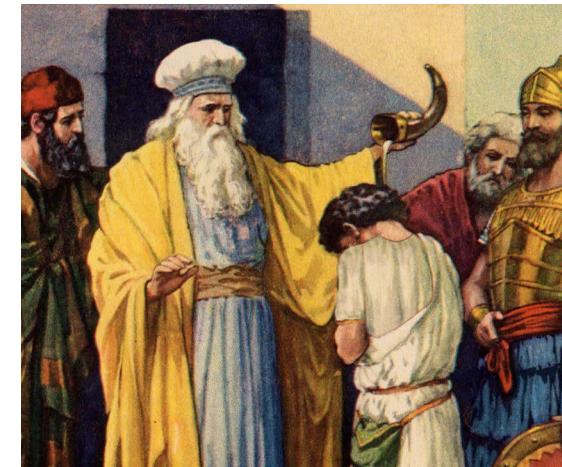
LET US PRAY

Gracious Lord, we thank you for all of your gifts of love and goodness. Help us treasure

and use those gifts in loving you and loving neighbors. Grant that we might be your love and grace in word and deed with all we meet this day and every day. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

CHARGE AND BLESSING

Go in peace, remembering God looks on your heart, Love God, Love neighbors. In the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



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