

1 Samuel 15:34–16:13

New Revised Standard Version

Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul. Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel. The 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.” Samuel 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.’ Invite 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.” Samuel 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?” He 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.

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the Lord.” But 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.” Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.” Samuel 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.” He 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.” Then 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. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

This summer we are going to hear about the earliest leaders of Israel — Samuel, Saul, and David. Samuel was the last judge of Israel before he established the monarchy and chose its first king to be Saul. Saul seemed to struggle with severe depression with his extreme paranoia and anger. We are told that God regretted selecting Saul as the king because Saul did not obey God. Samuel went to Saul and told him, “God has rejected you as king.” Saul said, “I have sinned. I violated the Lord’s command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them.” Saul did not obey God’s command and God told Samuel to pick a new king. Saul was not happy about losing his power. Today we hear a story about God and Samuel picking the next king of Israel, from the line of Jesse in Bethlehem. READ SCRIPTURE.

Samuel was ready. He had filled the horn with oil and had the heifer for the sacrifice, so he has an excuse for why he is going to Bethlehem. When Samuel gets there, the leaders know that Samuel and King Saul are having trouble and they are terrified that they will be drawn into the fight. But Samuel was ready to pick the new king of Israel. Normally the oldest son would be anointed as the leader, but that isn’t what God had in mind. Samuel goes down the list of Jesse’s sons, rejecting each one until there are none left. David wasn’t even on his dad’s radar so he didn’t come home from working with the sheep. Everyone knew the new king would be someone that they expected because that was how it worked ... until it didn’t. As the youngest son David was still out in the fields since there was no chance he would be selected. God had a different idea about who should be the next king.

When I was in preacher school at Perkins School of Theology at SMU, I remember one of my professors, Ed Sylvest, saying to me, “When you’re a pastor,” and I looked behind me convinced that he was talking about someone else. I didn’t look like a pastor. I thought pastors were men with big bellies and deep voices. I had never seen a woman as a pastor even though I grew up in a Methodist church. I didn’t know that women could be pastors until I saw it for myself. I took a class in college called Religion in America and every week we visited a different

place of worship. One week we were going to visit a local Presbyterian church. I took my boyfriend, now husband Lee, with me, and we found ourselves in a church with all older people. Out bounced the young, female pastor, and I remember leaning over to Lee and saying, “I could do that,” and he said that I could. We might try to tell ourselves that we can’t do something or be something because we haven’t seen it before, and we have to remember that God may have something different in mind.

My favorite part of the story we read is, “For God does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.” My daughter just completed her Gold Award in Girl Scouts. Her project was called, “You Can’t Be What You Can’t See.” In recognition of the disparity between the number of men versus women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), she hosted virtual coding camps for girls to inspire more girls to pursue STEM-related careers. We all need role models who look like us to encourage us, to give us confidence, and to empower us.

After Jesse parades seven of his sons from oldest to youngest before Samuel, God tells Samuel it isn’t about height or beauty. No more tall, handsome guys as leader, thank you very much!¹ We have just been told that we should look more as God looks, at the heart instead of the outside, but the writer wants us to know although David is ruddy and red-faced, he did have beautiful eyes and was handsome. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder after all. As we learn more about David, we will find out if his heart matches his outward appearance.

Sometimes we have to look the part, right? I remember when I was a chaplain at Children’s Medical Center. I was called out for not dressing professionally, which was so embarrassing. I rationalized that I was recently out of college and I liked dressing in comfy clothes. So, when we had an intern here at Greenland Hills who was recently out of college as well, I noticed that he needed to step up his dressing professionally game. I had a conversation with our intern Roy and told him that he needed to stop wearing shorts to church. He might need to make a hospital visit and you never know what the day will hold as a pastor. I was nervous about the conversation but I thought it went okay. The next day Roy walks into the church wearing shorts and I said, “Roy! We talked about this, you have to dress professionally!” Roy said, “Oh, I thought that was just a suggestion.”

We live in a culture oriented to image and appearance. We want to look young and strong. We want to be cool and fit in. When I was growing up, my mom gave us our back-to-school spending money for clothes and we could spend it as we wanted. My sister wanted to use all of her back-to-school shopping money to buy Jordache jeans. As a result, she could only afford three pair, not enough to make it through the week, and she had to quickly learn how to do her own laundry!

I hope we hear this morning that we have to lead where we are because God finds possibilities for grace in the most unexpected places and through the most unlikely people. Samuel has chosen a shepherd’s youngest son to be Israel’s future king. All of the usual arrangements for power and influence have been laid aside. Jesse isn’t a man of wealth or influence. We live in a world that seeks patterns to power. You have to have financial resources to run for elected office. If you want to be a leader, you better have the credentials and resources to back it up. It is hard for us to look beyond the traditional channels of power, influence, and success. Do we see people at the margins as leaders? Do we see the elderly, immigrants, people of a different race than ours as leaders, as people that we can listen to and learn from? Who in your life can teach you and be a leader for you?

¹ <https://www.patheos.com/progressive-christian/the-right-to-interpret-the-will-of-god-john-c-holbert-06-08-2015>

Anyone can be a leader, it's not the oldest or the most appropriate. God can find hope for a new future among the most unexpected, even among us. How is God asking you to lead where you are right now? I love the story of Esther in the Bible. It's only ten chapters if you want to read it today. Esther wins the beauty contest to become the new Queen after the King gets tired of the first Queen. But, Esther is a Jew and is able to use her power and influence to save the Jewish people from being killed. She acted with courage and faith to do what was right, to speak up and to use her voice for good. My favorite verse in that story is Esther 4:14, "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this." It could be that you are where you are living on your street, at your current job, in this town, with your group of friends, in your family so that you can be a leader and help share the love and grace of God with those specific people at this specific time. For such a time as this. May God help us see the possibilities for grace today. Thanks be to God, Amen.