

This week we hear another story of Call – that of David as the king of Israel. He is subversively crown (or anointed) by the priest Samuel (called to be a truth-teller in last week's scripture of 1 Samuel 3). Here he is afraid of the current king, Saul. For Samuel is commanded by God to commit treason: to anoint a new king while the old one is still on the throne. He is afraid of the King. (9:1) He is directed to *Bethlehem*, a city outside of the royal reach of Saul's Northern Kingdom. Yet there the people are afraid too of the political implications of the prophet's arrival (9:4). This story of a new beginning, of God's sovereign power working within the happenings of human history, of the divine import not on the physical appearance but on something else, all of this begins in the tension of fear, anxiety and human trembling.

In the unfolding history of Israel, we skip over the wandering of the people of God in the wilderness, their arrival and establishment in the promised land as well as the stories of the Judges and Ruth. Today's story is one of endings and a new beginning, law and gospel, of death and resurrection.

Today's story tells of God doing a new thing. The first King of Israel, Saul, has been found to be sinful, ego-centered and unfaithful first and foremost to the will of God. Anointed as the first king by Samuel, Saul is portrayed as the embodiment of the perfect king (that's to say physically beautiful, strong and big). We read in 1 Samuel 9:1-2:

¹ There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish son of Abiel son of Zeror son of Becorath son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth. ² He had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; he stood head and shoulders above everyone else.

Although at the time of this story Saul is still the king, he has now been cut off and thrown down by God. We hear of this in: 1 Samuel 13:13-14:

¹³ Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which he commanded you. The Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever, ¹⁴ but now your kingdom will not continue; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart; and the Lord has appointed him to be ruler over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you."

And 1 Samuel 15:26-28:

²⁶ Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel." ²⁷ As Samuel turned to go away, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. ²⁸ And Samuel said to him, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this very day, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you."

SCRIPTURES FOR

SUNDAY 10.22.2017

1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 51:10-14

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹ 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." ² 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.' ³ 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." ⁴ 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?" ⁵ 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.

⁶ When they came, he looked on **Eliab** and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." ⁷ 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." ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ¹⁰ Jesse made *seven* of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." ¹¹ 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." ¹² 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."

Eliab : The is a strong resemblance made between the eldest son of Jesse: Eliab (and seemingly the natural one to pick as the new king) and Saul. Both are described as strong, big and handsome [compare 1 Samuel 16:6-7 with 1 Samuel 9:2]. David is contrasted with them both. He is small, the youngest, ruddy, seemingly the family runt. (Curiously he is described as exceedingly handsome by the author!). God is sovereign, making choices that we might not, seeing the world in ways that we might not. Where we often see someone as marginal, God sees might and majesty. The apostle Paul talks of this in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 as he writes about God's vision and call of all of us.

²⁶ Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no one might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD CAME MIGHTILY UPON DAVID : David is set aside by God's presence, as Saul was at his anointing (1 Samuel 10:1-12). The word "Spirit" means "breath" or "wind" – the invisible that moves the visible. Metaphorically this phrasing, often used in scripture, points to the mysterious truth that God's life is present and at work in men and women, inviting us to be continuously alert to the working of God whom we cannot see in the people and events that we do see. (adapted from Eugene Peterson in his commentary on 1 & 2 Samuel).

clean heart טָהוֹר [tahor] in Hebrew meaning clean, pure as opposed to that which is unclean (literally and religiously) and impure. It implies the opposite of God's intent or desire. The Hebrews thought of the heart as the center of one's being (where as we might say the "soul" or "mind"/intellect). And so the prayer is for God to bring the petitioners whole being, from its center, back in alignment with God's plan, purpose and passion.

right spirit רוּחַ [ruach] in Hebrew meaning: "spirit" "breath" or "wind" – the invisible that moves the visible. The Hebrew word כֹּן [kon] here translated as "right" can also mean "established", "prepared", "ready", "ordained", or "ordered". It's a prayer to have one's breath re-ordered in the direction of the Holy Spirit (the breath of God which orders, creates and prepares the world for God's presence.

"In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth...a wind [RUACH] from God swept over the face of the waters." Genesis 1:1-2

deliverance : The Hebrew the word צִדְקָה [tsedaqah] is used here, and can mean: righteousness, honesty, justice, merits, the "right" and also vindication. This is the state of God, the reality of God's person – righteous vindication, deliverance and salvation – God's being that we are invited to enter into through relationship.

¹³ 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*.

Psalm 51:10-14

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

- ¹⁰ Create in me a **clean heart**, O God, and put a new and **right spirit** within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.
- ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.
- ¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your *deliverance*.

Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

- What shimmers for you in these passages?
- What image most speaks to you today?
- How does the story of the call of David intersect your own story?
- How have you experienced God's call in your life?
- How, when and where have you experienced this mysterious paradox of God's calling – that God often calls and chooses what we wouldn't, seeing more than we can or do?
- Is there a biblical story that your story echoes? Possibly one of those we've looked at this season: Adam and Eve; Abram and Sarah; Moses; Aaron, or Samuel? How so?
- Talk with God about your sense of calling or your desire to have a clearer sense of call and God's presence in your life. How does your limited vision keep you from knowing all of the fullness, goodness and peace God wants for you to know?