

SEEING

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Grace be unto you and peace from God our creator and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Text: I Samuel 16:1-13

. " ¹¹Samuel 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.' ¹²He 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.'" (vs. 11-12)

Introduction:

1. *This happened about a month ago just outside of Hosmer, a little town in the back country of South Dakota.*

This out-of-state traveler was on the side of the road, hitchhiking on a real dark night in the middle of a thunderstorm. Time passed slowly and no cars went by. It was raining so hard he could hardly see his hand in front of his face.

Suddenly he saw a car moving slowly, approaching and appearing ghost like in the rain. It slowly and silently crept toward him and stopped. Wanting a ride real bad the guy jumped in the car and closed the door; only then did he realize that there was nobody behind the wheel, and no sound of an engine to be heard over the rain.

Again the car crept slowly forward and the guy was terrified, too scared to think of jumping out and running. The guy saw that the car was approaching a sharp curve and, still too scared to jump out, he started to pray and began begging for his life; he was sure the ghost car would go off the road and into a nearby lake and he would drown!

But just before the curve, a shadowy figure appeared at the driver's window and a hand reached in and turned the steering wheel, guiding the car safely around the bend. Then, just as silently, the hand disappeared through the window and the hitchhiker was alone again! Paralyzed with fear, the guy watched the hand reappear every time they reached a curve.

Finally, the guy, scared to near death, had all he could take and jumped out of the car and ran and ran, into town, into Hosmer. Wet and in shock, he went into a coffee shop and voice quavering, ordered two cups of coffee, then told everybody about his supernatural experience.

A silence enveloped and everybody got goose bumps when they realized the guy was telling the truth (and was not just some drunk or crazy).

About half an hour later two guys walked into the café and one says to the other, “Look Ole, ders dat idiot that rode in our car when we wuz pushin it in de rain.”

2. Seeing is believing in a scientific world, or so we like to say.
3. But the problem is, “Who is seeing what?”
4. A familiar Lenten theme is the light of Christ.
5. Christ shines into human lives and we see God’s children.
6. See is believing; so consider the danger you experience to ask a preacher who has spent 15 years taking men and women before the Lord in the call process to speak to you.

Part I. Consider how a servant of God is sent to a people of God.

A. We all know Samuel. He was born into the faith and taken to the sanctuary as a baby by believing parents who gave gladly to the church from their family. The boy learned the faith from his church leaders and served the congregation as he was able in his youth.

B. Eventually Samuel was asked to be a leader of the people of God. He eventually functioned as a “seer” for God’s people Israel. Sometimes he was prophet. Sometimes he was judge. Sometimes he led worship as a priest. Sometimes he gave teaching or pastoral care, but he was God’s servant sent to God’s people through good times and bad.

C. Imagine the pain in Samuel’s ministry when the Israelites told him that he didn’t demonstrate enough of God’s leadership in their lives in these scary modern times and they wanted a king to lead them against their godless enemies. After all, seeing is believing and Samuel tried to warn them, but they found a tall, handsome leader and he was pretty impressive until he forgot why he was the leader. Now Samuel had the additional pain of knowing that hapless and helpless and overwhelmed Saul would lead God’s people away from faith, because King Saul had lost his faith.

D. “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.’” (I Samuel 16:1)

E. So the servant of God is sent to a town where the local leaders are scared he will cause trouble. He is in fear for his own safety and future. He is to lead a sacrificial liturgy that will end with a sacred meal so that the family of Jesse in Bethlehem may offer a son to be king in Israel.

F. I think of Garrison Keillor’s definition: “Evangelists are almost always deeply flawed people. If evangelists are able to live with their flaws, it somehow enables them to do what they do. Evangelists have one simple job, and that is to shake people loose from their illusions. They are the rock and rollers of the church. Evangelists are supposed to get out there and shake it.” (11/2010 context)

G. A servant of God is sent.

Part II. Consider how God searches the heart.

A. Samuel leads the purification liturgy and in true patriarchal fashion Jesse brings his sons to meet the host of the sacred meal. The boys are presented in birth order.

B. “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.’” (I Samuel 16:7)

For example: A woman and six children were walking toward a park. An elderly man who was also headed there stopped the woman and said with a smile, “My, what a nice group of children! Are they all yours...or is this a picnic?” The woman’s response was immediate. “Yes! They’re all my children, and this ain’t no picnic!”

C. Seeing is believing, but God is looking at the heart, not physical strength, not looks, no human intelligence or human logic. Human judgments are superficial. Helen of Troy destroyed a civilization. Abraham Lincoln created a nation and defined freedom.

D. God searches the heart.

Conclusion:

1. So I want us to remember the rest of the story.
2. I call it, “Believing is Seeing.”
3. “¹³Then 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.” (I Samuel 16:13)
4. I like to tell call committees that for 15 years I have taken names to call committees, and I always guess which ones the committee will pick for the call.
5. I haven’t been right for 15 years, and that is how I remember I am just a messenger for God.
6. But at the end of every call process, we read the advice of St. Paul to the young pastor, Timothy, in the installation service: “Do not neglect the gift you have that was given to you when the council of elders laid their hands upon you.”
7. Leader of God’s people, you have been anointed by the Holy Spirit of God.
8. You were brought before the God who searches the heart.
9. Live as children of light, for in Christ Jesus, believing is seeing the light of the world.
...and vacations
The sign in front of Faith Lutheran Church, Toledo, Ohio, is two-sided. One side displays the message: “Now is a great time to visit.” The other side says: “Our pastor is on vacation.” (Robert A. Haaf, Toledo, Ohio, 7/2006, “Lutheran”)
10. Believing is seeing the presence of God.

Amen.

The peace of God, that passes all understanding, keep your hearts and souls in Christ Jesus, to life everlasting. Amen.