

The Lord  
 does not look at  
 the things people look at.  
 People look  
 at the outward  
 appearance,  
 but the Lord  
 looks at the heart. 1 Samuel 16:7

Start with why, says Simon Sinek<sup>1</sup>. If you want to figure out why some companies grow and flourish and others do not, Sinek suggests that you look at why the company exists and how that why then drives everyday actions. How that why underscores the company's ethics and decisions. This approach also works with people and with churches. How many of us have, at one time or another, asked questions like "why do I exist" or "why is there such pain in my life." Why and why not are great beginnings to fundamental questions that can help us focus and go forward.

Why did Saul go so astray as a king of Israel that God was sorry he had made Saul king? This is one of two places in our Bible where we read that God was sorry. God was sorry for the flood and vowed never to flood the entire earth again. The rainbow is our symbol of God's promise to us not to flood the entire earth again. This second time God's disappointment in Saul leads ultimately to Saul's death and the raising of David as king of Israel.

But before we get to Samuel anointing Saul as king there was a give-and-take between Samuel and the leaders of Israel over the whole issue of a king, rather than judges continuing to be the leaders of Israel. Samuel, at God's urging, warned the leaders of all the downsides to a king: that the king would charge taxes, the king would conscript their young men and send them to die in war and so on - but the people ignored those warnings and insisted that king they would have. The people wanted to be like all others nations so that the king "will rule over us and go out at our head and fight our battles." When God heard this, God said to Samuel to "make it so."

And thus it came to be that Saul became king of Israel, anointed by Samuel. As part of Saul's transition from peasant to king, we are told that God gave Saul another heart (1 Sam. 10). And yet even a new heart did not stop Saul from overstepping his role and taking on the role and responsibilities of Samuel. And for that transgression and others, Saul's sons would not succeed him. Saul, after being anointed king by God, turned away from God and failed to follow God's commands. Thus, the search for a new king begins.

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Sinek. Start with Why (New York: Penguin, 2009)

The familiar story of Jesse and his sons being paraded before Samuel reminds us that God does not always do the expected. In a time and a culture where normally the eldest inherits, David, the youngest is chosen. This is a motif we have seen before: Abel over Cain; Isaac over Ishmael; Jacob over Esau. The choosing of the unexpected reminds us that God sees our inner heart and does not rely upon our outer appearance or accomplishments. What matters to God is our “why.”

Do we know God’s teachings and do we follow them, even when it may be hard. What in our past helps us go forward placing our trust in God. In David’s case, he was an obedient youngest son, doing the job as shepherd. That very position of caring and leading the sheep may have later helped him care for and lead Israel. And we are told that the Spirit of the Lord gripped David from that day on. That language reminds me of our baptism when we are sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ’s own forever (BCP 308). The why of whose we are and what we are called to be and to do starts with the Holy Spirit and the anointing with chrism. Nothing you can do can take away that anointing. The question is what you do now that you are God’s own. Will you live a life that honors God and God’s teachings? Will you be part of the spread of the realm of God in how you live your life?

God’s realm is both here-and-now and yet-to-come. God asks us to plant the seeds. What happens to those seeds is in God’s hands. The earth brings forth fruit in due season even without our active participation. Our time to act will come again at the harvest. This small parable is a reminder to us that God is God and we are not. And, even as we are not God, we still have a role to play in helping God’s realm expand and grow. How we live, how we use our God-given talents, matters. Why do I do what I do? Because I believe God is creator and redeemer and sustainer. And that I have a part of how God’s realm comes to be.

Just as we were reminded in the reading from First Samuel that God sees our hearts and is not swayed by outward appearance, and that God often uses the unexpected, such as a youngest son, we see in this reading from Mark that God can and does use a common and invasive weed to provide shelter to God’s creatures. God uses the unexpected or that which the world scorns to accomplish God’s purposes.

We can argue about factual inaccuracies in a mustard seed not actually being the smallest seed in the world – or in a mustard seed growing into a tree rather than a bush – but what matters is that God uses what is before God. God doesn’t rely upon our rules and regulations that only the eldest inherit, or only the beautiful or handsome have a leadership role. God looks upon our hearts regardless of our outward appearance. God looks upon our suitability rather than precedent.

God uses a common weed to provide shelter for God’s creatures. God calls on us to look beyond the physical and seek the inward sign of God’s grace and love for us. We each have a role to play in bringing God’s realm to fruition. Perhaps ours is to plant the seeds by showing love and compassion to someone who is feeling lonely or alienated from society. Perhaps it is in training others to fully utilize their gifts and talents for the betterment of others. Perhaps it is in leading in ethical and responsible ways that respect the dignity of all persons. Perhaps it is in giving of what we have been given so that others may prosper. Whatever your gifts and talents may be, use them for the glory of God.

4 Pentecost – Proper 6

June 17, 2018

1 Samuel 15:34-16:13; Psalm 20; 2 Corinthians 5:6-17; Mark 4:26-34

And from Psalm 104: Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth. **'Amen.**