

Let's go back to the beginning where all this king stuff started. Samuel was a judge at the time (not a judge like we think of a judge). Samuel was essentially a leader of the people. Samuel had two sons, Joel and Abijah. His sons, however, did not follow in his ways. They took bribes and distorted justice. The people could see that Samuel wasn't getting any younger and that his sons were certainly not qualified to succeed him, so they practically begged Samuel to appoint a king to rule over Israel. They wanted a king just like all the other nations. Samuel didn't like the idea so he prayed to God about it. God said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Now then listen to their voice; only – you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them." God was essentially saying, "Look Samuel, it's not you. They have the only king they will ever need in me, but if it's a king they want then it's a king they will get. Just warn them it's not going to be all roses."

Samuel then warned the people of what it would be like to have a king and how they would be under the thumb of a king, but the people refused to listen. They insisted on having a king. So Samuel began his search for a king. He found a king in a man named Saul. We are told that there was not a man in all of Israel more handsome than Saul and that Saul stood head and shoulders above all the rest. Saul looked the part of a king. Funny thing though, when the day came for Saul to be anointed king no one could find him! Turns out he was hiding among the baggage! When Saul finally stood up in front of the people, Samuel said, "Do you see the one whom the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people." Then all the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

To make a long story short, Saul didn't work out as king of Israel. He disobeyed the Lord on more than one occasion and things were so bad that God said to Samuel, "I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me, and has not carried out my commands." Samuel was devastated and he cried out to God all night long. That brings us to our story for today. Saul is still king of Israel and Samuel is sick to his stomach. God asked Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul?" In other words, "I'm over it so why don't you get over it? Let's find a new king and get moving." It seemed that Samuel took the disaster of Saul as king worse than God. There was obviously something about Samuel's character that made him a

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caring individual who took personal responsibility, even for things that he had little or no control over. Samuel also appeared to be the kind of person who dwelled on things, especially past failures and disappointments.

It's so easy to allow our past failures and disappointments to consume us. Sometimes the only thing that stands between us and a bright future is our perception of the past. I had a professor in seminary named Dr. Lester. Dr. Lester was an extremely kind person who taught pastoral care. One of the main lessons I learned from Dr. Lester is that all of us have a past story, a present story, and a future story, and all three are related in more ways than we can imagine. Obviously, what we think about the past affects our present story and future story, but in turn, how we view the future also determines our present story of today and even how we interpret our past. If you and I only remember the negatives from our past then we are doomed in the present and the future. We will go through life like Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh. Eeyore is the donkey who walks around all day with this woe is me attitude. Samuel was at a crossroads and was doing his best imitation of Eeyore. God had called him to this difficult work of being judge over the people and Samuel was faced with a crisis. Samuel's initial reaction was to look at what happened in the past and allow that to determine how he behaved in the present.

When God called Samuel to find a new king Samuel hesitated, and naturally so; since Saul was already the king and had maniac tendencies. Samuel feared for what Saul might do to him if he up and decided to make a change midstream. But God had a plan. This is the part I like best about the story. God decided to be a little tricky in how Samuel would select a new king. God knew that Samuel had to be protected from Saul so he had Samuel pretend that he was going to make a sacrifice. Samuel was directed to invite Jesse, the father of the eventual King David, to the sacrifice and it would be at that time Samuel could look for a king. Sneaky? Yes. A little deceitful? Perhaps. Some people might think it a little troubling that God would actually direct Samuel to be deceitful, but maybe we should understand that God is a God who does what it takes to get things done. After all, it's not like God asked Samuel to do something that would hurt someone.

Samuel did exactly what God commanded him to do. He went to Bethlehem and pretended to come with the purpose of offering sacrifices to God. Then the real drama began! Jesse and his seven sons came to the sacrifice and one by one Samuel met each of Jesse's sons. The first was

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Eliab. Samuel took one look at Eliab and thought to himself, “This is going to be easy. This is the one. If ever there was a guy that looked the part of a king, then this is him.” But God didn’t think so. God 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.”

There is a story about a guy who had a donkey for sale. One day he got a call about the donkey. As he talked to the man about the donkey, he said, “He’s a great donkey, but there is only one problem, he doesn’t look all that good.” The potential buyer thought to himself: “That’s okay. I don’t care what he looks like.” The two men made the deal and the buyer took the donkey home. The next day he noticed something peculiar about the donkey. The donkey kept running into things. It was as if the donkey was in another world. He called the man back and said, “What is the deal with this donkey? He keeps running into things and doesn’t seem to have a clue?” The man replied, “I told you he doesn’t look all that good. He’s blind!”

The other night our son Benjamin tried on his mother’s glasses. Both Alisha and I have bad eyesight. I’m so nearsighted if I didn’t wear contacts I would be blind as a bat. Alisha is not much better so you can imagine Benjamin’s reaction when he put on her glasses. He put them on and said, “Whoaaaaa!” Translation – I can’t see a thing! Alisha then said to him, “The reason you can’t see when you put my glasses on is that those glasses were made especially for Mama.” That’s how it is with God and us. We put on the glasses of life and sometimes things appear a little fuzzy and we don’t understand. What we fail to understand is that God’s glasses were not made for us and were never intended for us in the first place. As curious human beings we want to know everything but the reality is that God has made us to where we will not know everything, at least not on this earth.

God sees the world so much differently than we do. This is especially true with tragedies. I think of the recent suicides in our community and you cannot help but shake your head and wonder why. We want answers where there are no answers. We want reasons where there are no reasons. We want explanations where there are no explanations. If it’s not a tragedy like a suicide maybe it’s trouble within the family. We see the situation one way while God sees it in another way. I know many of you have looked back over your life and have seen how God has worked good out of some messy situations, in your own life and in others lives.

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When everyone else saw David they saw a young boy who worked with sheep. He was certainly nothing special, and certainly not what you would call a candidate to be king. In fact, I would venture a guess that if a poll had been taken among the people not one person would have voted for David as the next king. He just didn't look the part, but sure enough, he was exactly the one God had in mind. God has this habit of taking ordinary people and doing extraordinary things with them and through them. God does this to show that it is God who is making things happen and not us. God can even take an unwilling human being and accomplish whatever God wants to accomplish. The story of Jonah comes to mind. If there ever was an unwilling participant in God's plan it was Jonah.

Jonah was a prophet who God called to go to Nineveh to offer one last chance for forgiveness for the people. The only problem was that the people of Nineveh and the Israelites didn't get along. So when God told Jonah to get on a ship headed for Nineveh, Jonah hopped a ship in the other direction for the paradise of Tarshish. Along the way to Tarshish Jonah encountered a bad storm on the sea. Things got so bad that the other people on the ship decided to throw Jonah overboard because they thought he was the reason for their misfortune. Sure enough, when they threw him overboard the storm ceased. But that was not the end for Jonah because God provided a fish to house Jonah on the sea. The fish could only stomach Jonah for three days before he literally puked him out on the shore. Jonah finally wound up in Nineveh where he was directed to go in the first place, and he did do what God told him to do, albeit with a bad attitude and poor spirit. Amazingly, the people of Nineveh repented, but Jonah could have cared less. He didn't like the whole idea in the beginning and he sure didn't like it then. The story ends with Jonah pouting.

I like that story because it shows that God can do whatever God wants to do no matter who the person may be. The next time you think you are not qualified to speak for God or work for God, remember that you don't have to be. That's the whole point. God is the one who qualifies us to do what God wants. The irony of Samuel anointing David as king of Israel is that it stood in direct contrast to how Saul was anointed king. With Saul there was a lot of pomp and circumstance. Samuel spoke eloquent words about Saul, the people shouted, "Long live the king!", and then Saul was anointed king. With David Samuel didn't say a word. David didn't say a word either. There were no parades, no trumpets, no applause – just a little anointing oil and silence. But compared to the anointing of Saul, we get the feeling that

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there was something more powerful about David's anointing. Words would have only spoiled the moment. It was truly a holy moment when God took that young boy from working in the field and made him a king.

God is at work in the small seemingly insignificant moments of life. These moments cannot be created by us or manipulated by us. They are free, gracious gifts from God. I think of last week in how we ended our worship service. The love that was displayed in this sanctuary as you said goodbye to Francis and Cliff was powerful. The Spirit of God was truly among us in that moment. Earlier this week I had the opportunity to experience another one of those moments. Ironically, it involved Cliff and Francis again. Alisha and I were over at their house visiting and there was another friend of theirs visiting at the same time. I knew this man from Tehuacana so we sat and visited and had a good time. Then something incredible happened. He got up from the sofa and went over to Cliff to say goodbye, but he just didn't offer those empty words we have all heard before. He knelt down beside Cliff, took his hand, and with tears in his eyes he looked Cliff square in the eye and said, "I just wanted you to know what a good friend you have been to me. I'm going to miss you." In that moment there was a holy silence in the house that I will never forget, and it reminded me that the truly great things in life cannot be fabricated. They are gifts from God and often go unnoticed.

He was just an ordinary boy but God took him and made something of him. It was just an ordinary piece of wood, but God took it and made a cross out of it. Then he took his Son and placed him to die on that wood in a moment that went largely unnoticed by the world. Yet today we gather in this place around this table to remember that God's Spirit is still active among us, and that God is still working through the ordinary moments and through ordinary people.