

John 9:1-13, 28-41
Lent IV
Seeing As God Sees
St. Mary the Virgin
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Peter R. Powell

1 Sam 16 The LORD said to Samuel, "How long are you going to grieve over Saul? I have rejected him as king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and get going. I'm sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem because I have found^[a] my next king among his sons." **2** "How can I do that?" Samuel asked. "When Saul hears of it he'll kill me!" "Take a heifer with you," the LORD replied, "and say, 'I have come to make a sacrifice to the LORD.'" **3** Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will make clear to you what you should do. You will anoint for me the person I point out to you." **4** Samuel did what the LORD instructed. When he came to Bethlehem, the city elders came to meet him. They were shaking with fear. "Do you come in peace?" they asked. **5** "Yes," Samuel answered. "I've come to make a sacrifice to the LORD. Now make yourselves holy, then come with me to the sacrifice." Samuel made Jesse and his sons holy and invited them to the sacrifice as well. **6** When they arrived, Samuel looked at Eliab and thought, That must be the LORD's anointed right in front. **7** But the LORD said to Samuel, "Have no regard for his appearance or stature, because I haven't selected him. God^l doesn't look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the LORD sees into the heart." **8** Next Jesse called for Abinadab, who presented himself to Samuel, but he said, "The LORD hasn't chosen this one either." **9** So Jesse presented Shammah, but Samuel said, "No, the LORD hasn't chosen this one." **10** Jesse presented seven of his sons to Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD hasn't picked any of these." **11** Then Samuel asked Jesse, "Is that all of your boys?" "There is still the youngest one," Jesse answered, "but he's out keeping the sheep." "Send for him," Samuel told Jesse, "because we can't proceed until he gets here." **12** So Jesse sent and brought him in. He was reddish brown, had beautiful eyes, and was good-looking. The LORD said, "That's the one. Go anoint him." **13** So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him right there in front of his brothers. The LORD's spirit came over David from that point forward. Then Samuel left and went to Ramah

John 9 As Jesus walked along, he saw a man who was blind from birth. **2** Jesus' disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned so that he was born blind, this man or his parents?" **3** Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents. This happened so that God's mighty works might be displayed in him. **4** While it's daytime, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work. **5** While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." **6** After he said this, he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and smeared the mud on the man's eyes. **7** Jesus said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of

Siloam" (this word means *sent*). So, the man went away and washed. When he returned, he could see. ⁸ The man's neighbors and those who used to see him when he was a beggar said, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some said, "It is," and others said, "No, it's someone who looks like him." But the man said, "Yes, it's me!" ¹⁰ So they asked him, "How are you now able to see?" ¹¹ He answered, "The man they call Jesus made mud, smeared it on my eyes, and said, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and then I could see." ¹² They asked, "Where is this man?" He replied, "I don't know." ¹³ Then they led the man who had been born blind to the Pharisees. ²⁸ They insulted the blind man: "You are his disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. ²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses, but we don't know where this man is from." ³⁰ The man answered, "This is incredible! You don't know where he is from, yet he healed my eyes! ³¹ We know that God doesn't listen to sinners. God listens to anyone who is devout and does God's will. ³² No one has ever heard of a healing of the eyes of someone born blind. ³³ If this man wasn't from God, he couldn't do this." ³⁴ They responded, "You were born completely in sin! How is it that you dare to teach us?" Then they expelled him. ³⁵ Jesus heard they had expelled the man born blind. Finding him, Jesus said, "Do you believe in the Human One?" ³⁶ He answered, "Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him." ³⁷ Jesus said, "You have seen him. In fact, he is the one speaking with you." ³⁸ The man said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshipped Jesus. ³⁹ Jesus said, "I have come into the world to exercise judgment so that those who don't see can see and those who see will become blind." ⁴⁰ Some Pharisees who were with him heard what he said and asked, "Surely we aren't blind, are we?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you wouldn't have any sin, but now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

You've just heard a lot of bible and it has to be hard to keep it all in your head as I stand here preaching to you. Fortunately, the lessons are in your bulletin. I'm going to start with the OT lesson so look at the lesson from 1st Samuel. I will be quoting from the Common English Bible so you will notice a contrast between what you read and what I say. I am a fervent proponent of using a lot of English translations to tease the meaning out.

I have great affection for this text. It is one on only two texts¹ I remember from the two years I preached when I was an assisting priest at All Saints in Princeton². Almost everything I said was forgettable. I preached every Sunday³ because the rector, who had grown up in Argentina as the son of Canadian Mennonite Missionaries, believed that a serious sermon took 40 minutes but he tried to keep himself to 30. The parish asked me to preach at the Family Service since I could keep it short. I would think about the sermon on Saturday night and put it together on my drive to the church

¹ The other was a reference to the beatitudes. I was preaching from Luke 6:20, blessed are you poor and instead referred to Matt 5:3, blessed are the poor in spirit. Princeton is a wealthy town and I didn't want to speak against the wealth of the parishioners. One of them, a professor of Architecture at the University, told me I'd sold out the Gospel and betrayed the parishioners. My task as preacher was to preach the Gospel and not water it down. He made an impression.

² 1977-1979 when I was a doctoral candidate at Princeton Seminary.

³ I preached at the 9:00 Family Service and the Rector preached at the 11:00 Sung Mass.

Sunday morning, then deliver it walking up and down the center aisle and everyone loved it. I had nothing memorable or inspiring to say but I was friendly and I was always short. I don't think I often preached the Gospel.

But one Sunday this was the OT lesson and it occurred to me that this reading from 1 Sam is a perfect example of how the bible was edited and the message lost.

Saul is king and he is failing at his job. Everyone knows that but Saul. He has power but no support. Samuel is sent to anoint a new king and he is fearful, much as many who would like to be a Republican candidate for president are fearful, and he argues with God. He says, you can read this in in your bulletin, if I do this Saul will kill me. So God provides Samuel with a subterfuge; that is, he tells Samuel to tell Saul that he's going off to sacrifice. So that's what he does.

He gets to Jesse and knows this is the father of the king who will replace Saul, eventually, there's a lot of story yet to play out. So he asks Jesse to line up his sons so he can see which one will be the next king, and they are handsome men, but the Lord has chosen none of them. After the Lord has rejected the very handsome oldest son the Lord tells Samuel:

"Have no regard for his appearance or stature, because I haven't selected him. God doesn't look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the LORD sees into the heart." (CEB not RSV)

Samuel runs through all of Jesse's sons, 7 paragons of masculine physical virtue and none of them have what the Lord is looking for in the heart. They are all rejected. Seven of the best of Benjaminite manhood are rejected, yet Jesse is the father of the next king? How can that be?

Samuel asks Jesse if there is another son? Jesse says yes, but he's the youngest, he's not like his brothers. The youngest, too insignificant to be ranked with his brothers, the runt of the litter, good only to tend the sheep. He is summoned.

Remember the text: *"Have no regard for his appearance or stature, because I haven't selected him. God doesn't look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the LORD sees into the heart."*

He is the one. The Lord sees something in him despite his small stature and chooses him, David, to be the next king.

But then the editor who put this text together loses his way and contrary to the promise: *"Have no regard for his appearance or stature, because I haven't selected him God doesn't look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the LORD sees into the heart."* The editor loses the point of the story and gives us:

He was reddish brown, had beautiful eyes, and was good-looking.

Even the bible can betray us! When some say that the bible contradicts itself, an assertion I generally refute, in this case the editor of 1 Sam had not a clue. God chose David precisely because he was the runt of the litter and God sees into the Heart.

If you can, hold onto that thought and we will turn to the Gospel. It too is in your bulletin.

We encounter a man born blind. Everyone knew that an affliction of blindness was due to a curse. Someone had sinned that this horrible thing happened to a family. The blind man would be a source of constant shame. Jesus encounters the blind man. Jesus refutes the common wisdom that a man born blind was ipso facto a sinner. He

says that the man has been placed before him that God's glory might be revealed, and he heals him.

This upsets the natural order of things, those born blind are meant to stay blind and to beg. The man has not been restored he has been given a new gift, sight. A new life is possible for him. His neighbors are upset and object that this must be some sign of a curse. The healing was intended to show God's power and how what we think we know may be entirely wrong. But the people, you and me, defend the status quo and argue that Jesus has upset the natural order of things therefore Jesus must be the problem.

This marvelous action has occurred and only the man born blind is converted.

The miracle intended to show that Jesus is the Son of God is seen to show the opposite because we do not like our status quo threatened. We want God to bless what we think is a sign of blessing.

Remember *"Have no regard for his appearance or stature, because I haven't selected him. God doesn't look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the LORD sees into the heart."*

David is the runt of the litter, but the editor of 1 Sam doesn't want to believe that so he adds to the story that David is handsome more than any other. The man born blind is cursed and the people want to believe that so that refuse to see the miracle happening before their eyes, ironically, before their eyes.

We as a people, church, nation, city, too often live as if the sign of God's blessing is health, wealth and power. It is not. Today we have heard the story of a runt who becomes the greatest king of Israel and the story of a man born blind who reveals God's purpose in the world.

God works with that which we fail to value and understands it to be beyond all value. If we are to be the church, even if we are as reluctant as Samuel to carry out God's will and we need a subterfuge, then we are called to work to see as God sees and *"Have no regard for his appearance or stature, because I haven't selected him. God doesn't look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the LORD sees into the heart."*

My prayer is that as we walk through the second half of Lent we will work to see through God's eyes and value that which our world has rejected and no longer say that we can't end poverty because it's too expensive, and no longer say that we can't shelter the homeless and immigrant because it's too expensive, and no longer say that we can't provide treatment to the addicted because it's too expensive, and no longer say we can't, we can't, we can't because in God's Kingdom we can and our role is to make God's Kingdom on Earth⁴. In other words, we need to see as God sees and work for hope, not the status quo, and value thereby what God values. As God chose David, the runt of the litter and healed the blind man, someone everyone knew was cursed so may we work to provide shelter and housing, end poverty, make treatment available on demand, and all of the other things to make God's kingdom on Earth. This will bring us joyfully to Easter.

⁴ See especially the excellent recent article: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/16/opinion/poverty-abolition-united-states.html>