

Day Fifteen

Scripture:

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Reflection:

When it comes to elections, Americans seem determined to only vote for candidates that look right. Ever since the Kennedy-Nixon debates were televised, looking presidential, however, is most of the most talked-about and sought-after quality we want in candidates. Of course, many of our best presidents, if filtered through this scrutiny, would have never made it on to the ballot. Lincoln was unattractive and gangly and wore ill-fitting clothing. John Adams was short, plump, and bald. And, of course, Washington was plagued with poorly fitting and painful dentures (in spite of what you might have heard, they were not wooden).

Saul had undoubtedly looked kingly. Far taller than the average man, he towered above others at national gatherings. Saul was also a capable warrior and was popular with the people. When Samuel was sent on a secret mission to select Saul's replacement, he naturally expected God's choice would look kingly. He may have been a little surprised God sent him to an obscure family in the nearby village of Bethlehem. But, Jesse did have more than a half dozen sons. Some of them, no doubt, would have looked like they could do the job.

But, one by one, God indicated Samuel was standing in front of the wrong son. Finally, the undersized runt of the group

was left. But, everyone thought this boy was so unlikely that he was still working out in the fields. In the end, Samuel had no choice but to send for the young shepherd boy named David.

In this, Samuel will find himself standing in front of the most celebrated king in the history of ancient Israel. We might think of David mostly because of his psalms. But, in the perceptions of Jews, both ancient and modern, he is a great king and a “man after God’s own heart.” Most importantly for us, God promises David that his dynastic line will never end. That is, the world will always have a king who is the descendant of David. So central is this in Jewish thinking that the title “Son of David” is the same thing as calling someone the “Messiah” (or Christ).

So, Samuel anoints (this is the same root word as Messiah) a child who will, many years later, be recognized as the king of all Israel. A thousand years in the future, the Spirit of God, coming down from heaven like a dove, will anoint a descendant of David to be not only the King of Israel but the King of all Kings.

Family:

Materials: Take an old book you do not want to preserve (this object lesson requires damaging the book). Using a craft knife or “exacto” knife, cut out a square area in the middle of the book’s pages to hold treats (candy or something else your children would really like that is small enough to work). Cut the section out closer to the binding edge than the outer edge so the book will hold its shape when closed. Even then, you will probably need to leave the book flat to keep

the treats from falling out. Put some other books on the table, enough so the modified book is not obvious.

There's an old saying you will sometimes hear, "You can't judge a book by its cover." But, I'm not so sure. Look at these books. Just look at the outside part, the cover and the words on the cover. Tell me what's inside some of the books.

(One by one point to a book and ask if anyone knows what's inside. After someone guesses correctly, open that book and thumb through a few pages, congratulating them on being so smart. As you do this, keep saying things like, "Well look at that. I guess you can know what's inside by just looking at the outside." Finally, point to the book you prepared. Let them guess what's inside. Don't give away that there is anything different about it. Then, leaving the book on the table, open it up revealing the treats. Point out that some of the time you can't know what's on the inside by looking at the outside. That's what people mean when they say, "You can't judge a book by its cover.")

The Bible passage today is the prophet Samuel being sent by God to look for the next King of Israel. God sends him to the town of Bethlehem. And then down one of the streets. And then up to one house. This is the house of Jesse. And Samuel knows this is where he will find the next king.

But Jesse brings out his sons, one by one. He starts with the oldest and biggest and strongest. But, it is not him. Then the next oldest. But it is not him. One by one until he has seen every son in the house. Samuel is confused. He was sure this was the right house.

"Is this all the sons you have, Mr. Jesse?"

“Well, not exactly. I do have one more son, but he is way too young and way too small. I just left him out taking care of our sheep. I am sure he is not the one.”

But God whispered in Samuel's ear, “Samuel, do not decide just based on how someone looks. Remember, I do not look just at the outside. I also look at what is on the inside.”

So, they bring a little boy in from the fields. And, he really is very young. And he is not very big, even for his age. But, as soon as Samuel sees him, he knows. This is who God has picked to be the next king.

“And what is your name, young man?” Samuel asked.

“Sir, my name is David. What did you want me for?”

The Jesse Tree ornament for today is a crown. That is because David is going to become the King of Israel. Not just that, but God promises David that, one day, he will send the world an even greater king, who will be a great-great-great – and a whole lot more greats – grandson of David. And we will call this King, Jesus. And, just like David, he will be born in Bethlehem.

Shepherds will come and see a little baby in a manger and bow down to him as their king. How could they see a baby in a stable as a king? Because they knew God did not just look at the outward appearance. You cannot always judge a book by its cover.

Prayer:

The blind man near Jericho cried out, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me." In your prayer time, reflect on those things in your life that have been troubling your heart and mind. Take a few moments to talk to God about each one. Between each thing you bring up to Him, add the prayer: Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.

This type of prayer, called a "litany," is not only found in the book of Psalms but is used by Christians all over the world.