

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

May 15, 2016

“Overlooked”

Let the Children Come, part 2

I Samuel 16:1-13

As I begin this morning, I want to thank my beautiful wife for preaching for me last week. Over the years, I’ve kidded with her that one day, I’m going to wake up on Sunday morning too sick to preach, and she’s going to have to take my manuscript and read it. But last week, with my surgery, she wrote the whole message and delivered it herself. Folks, if you want proof that God will use you if you are just willing, I lift up Katja as exhibit “A”.

Our purpose in this church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. And God speaks to us through his Word to help us accomplish that purpose. God has a message for all of us today. So let us prepare ourselves. As we pray, I encourage you to lift up your hands with palms open as a symbol of your readiness to listen to the Lord.

Thank you God, for all that you are, and all that you do. You are the Creator, Provider, and Sustainer. You bring to us yourself in the Savior Jesus Christ, who died so that we could live and make this life count for your kingdom. Show us how to more deeply love you and serve our neighbors. Help us not to overlook a single thing you do in our lives. We pray this in the name of Jesus the Messiah. Amen.

Small things are important. Ask any fisherman who has ever launched the boat for the first time in the spring, and forgotten one tiny little piece when bringing the boat out of storage. Who knows what I’m talking about? The plug. Right. My dad did this once and fortunately noticed before the boat sank.

Another small thing we might overlook is our Bible. So I have a game for you this morning. It's called the sword drill. I will call out a scripture, and the first person who finds it, if you can stand up and read it aloud, I will give you a candy bar. "Swords" aka Bibles, ready? Look up Matthew 18:3.

"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus said we must have the faith of a child to be part of his kingdom, so the focus of my next few messages is on child-like faith. Note, I did not say childish faith. There is a difference. A childish faith says, "We all get wings and harps and sit on little white clouds when die." A childlike faith says, "I trust you, Jesus."

We tend to overlook children. But the Bible lifts them up as the examples we should follow if we want to know God.

Last week we read about the prophet Samuel, how his calling came as a boy. Today we get a glimpse of King David, who also received his calling when he was a young boy, working as a shepherd for his family.

1st Samuel chapter 16 begins with the Lord asking Samuel, "How long will you grieve King Saul?" Samuel anointed Saul king, and Saul chose to disobey. Samuel grieved, somewhat like a father, because Saul had been "his boy", his project. Samuel's grief reminds us all of a great truth: our sin doesn't hurt just ourselves, it hurts others. It causes pain to those who care about us.

Still, God told Samuel: Enough is enough. Go to Bethlehem, I'll tell you what to do next. Don't worry if King Saul finds out what you're up to. Invite Jesse and his family to a sacrifice. I'll show you who to anoint.

This next part cracks me up. Look at verse 4. The people in Bethlehem were afraid when Samuel showed up. As a pastor, I can't remember this ever happening to me. "Oh, no, it's the pastor!" No one has ever asked me if I came in peace. I just don't feel that intimidating. Sometimes, I wish people would tremble a little more when I approached. Don't you? Honestly, we can laugh at that thought, but the truth is, God's power should rest with us, if we are truly following Jesus. That should make us different, and maybe a little intimidating.

Samuel reassured these people that he did indeed come in peace. Samuel called up Jesse's family, consecrated them, and started the sacrifice. It was a fellowship offering, for honoring God and for sharing. But Samuel knew the real purpose of his visit, and the family figured it out pretty soon, too. Samuel was there to anoint a new king to replace Saul. They all started to wonder: Who is the Anointed One? The Chosen One? To put it in Star Wars terms – where is Anakin?

Funny, isn't it, how a modern movie reflects a biblical story thousands of years old? If you aren't a Star Wars fan, maybe you remember the Disney Movie, "The Sword in the Stone." Both films illustrate my point today. We overlook the small people who don't fit our preconceived images of heroes. Look at the today's scripture. Jesse's family were all there, except for...David. David was overlooked. He was just a little kid, out with the sheep, and he wasn't even invited to the party.

Have you ever felt overlooked? Maybe it was in gym class, and they were picking teams for dodgeball. I always hated that, because I didn't have much of an arm. But once I got into youth ministry, the kids always wanted me on their team!

No one likes to be left out. David must have felt disappointed when his family neglected him. Normally in this society, it was the firstborn that got all the glory and received the attention. Not the youngest kid stuck out in the field with the smelly sheep. But God had other plans.

Verse 7 says, God looked at the hearts of these sons of Jesse. Now, today, we think of the brain as being the source of our thoughts, emotion, feelings, etc. If you have seen the movie “Inside Out”, you know that the brain, not the heart, gets top billing. But in biblical times, the heart was thought to be the center of a person’s being. The heart was the center of vitality, emotions, intellect, morality, the part of a person that responded to God. Of all Jesse’s children, David alone had a heart for God. (I Samuel 13:14) It is something that he became famous for.

See, we like to look at appearances. I confess, I have often thought of myself as short. I wish I could be at least 5’10”. But that is not what counts in God’s view. It’s about heart, not height.

I remember playing snow football with my youth group many years ago. It was one of those days when I wished I were 6’ tall. We were playing another church that had real football players on it; they knew how to block. It was flag football, and a lot of us were still getting tackled. The thing was, though, we had a sixth grader who was about 4 feet tall, and they never covered him. He caught 20 passes for us, because he was always wide open. He was our MVP.

I always thought, that’s how God works. He takes the left-out, the overlooked, the “oh, he’s too puny, too weak” and turns them into great instruments for God’s kingdom. People like: Abraham – a nobody, a liar. Moses - a stutterer, a murderer. Jacob - the second born, a cheater. The Apostle Paul - a murderer, a Christ hater. David - a shepherd, the youngest, the overlooked.

Can I ask you personally, do you think that God can use you? If you say yes, Hallelujah! But I wonder if there aren't a few of us here that say, "Not really. I'm not smart enough, not bold enough, not eloquent enough. I've made too many mistakes. I don't have enough experience."

Before you decide God can't use you because of your deficiencies, think about the contrast between King Saul and King David.

Saul, the tall one, was loved by the people. David was short and unpopular. Saul was anointed with a little glass vial of oil. David was anointed with a big horn full of oil. Saul, the successful fighter, was eventually rejected by God for his disobedience. But Psalm 78:70 says God chose David and took him from the sheepfolds. Why? Because of David's heart, not his height.

Jesus said in Luke 16:15 that God knows our hearts. We get it confused, when we judge others by our human standards. Jesus' words were fierce. "What people value highly is detestable in God's sight." (Luke 16:15, NIV)

God can use you. God will use you. Don't sell yourself short.

There are really only two questions we must answer. What has God anointed our church to do? And whom have we overlooked?

Clearly, God calls us to be light to the world. He calls us to spread the good news that Jesus has come to save, not to condemn. He has called us as leaders, like David, to shepherd the people who are lost, wounded, and harassed.

To do that, we cannot afford to overlook anyone that God has placed in our community, especially not children. We have 15 students signed up to go to summer camp already. Whom else have we overlooked? Whom we can invite to be part of God's kingdom? The Middle School Youth Center meets in our building every week on Thursdays. These are our children, including kids from our very

own congregation. Are we “anointing” them? Are we serving them? Or are we expecting them to conform to our expectations, or even worse, are we ignoring them?

Jesus said the greatest in the kingdom are children. “Unless you change and become like one of these” you will not experience the kingdom of heaven.

(Matthew 18:3) We need our children to teach us to be like them!

I know it is hard for us to imagine being children again. Some of us are over 70 years old. Even at 40, I don’t do childish things as often as I used to. But the faith of a child is not the same as childish faith. It is trusting faith. It believing. It’s hoping. That’s the faith I want to have, and that’s the faith I want to pass on to the next generation.

God wants us to notice the Davids in our midst. Now, I have heard people claim “the children are our future.” I know they mean well, but the children are as much a part of our present as we are. Our investment in them is critical, and I don’t just mean camp scholarships. I’m talking about personal, relational investment. Time spent volunteering in the nursery, the Sunday School, Vacation Bible School. Taking them downstairs to sit next to you and eat a cookie. Stopping to ask the kid on your street, “How’s it going?” Learning their names. This is how we anoint them.

Like Jesse’s family, it’s easy to think that we are already at the feast. “Hey, the prophet invited us! We’re special!” But we must ask ourselves instead, who is out tending the sheep?

God has anointed people in this church and in this community to do great things for God’s glory, not our own. That includes the children among us. Let’s not overlook them. Let’s find them, anoint them, and learn from them.

Memory verse

I Samuel 16:7b - "The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Reflection questions

1. Have you ever overlooked something small that turned out to be very important? What was it? Why was it important?
2. How would you describe the "faith of a child"? How does that differ from "childish faith"?
3. Read deeper into I Samuel 16 and beyond. What made David a person after God's own heart? Which of his qualities would you like to have?
4. Have you overlooked yourself? What can God do through you?
5. Have you overlooked someone else? How is God calling you to "anoint" and encourage them?