

**We Are Yours, O God:  
We Are the Shepherds You Send  
1 Samuel 16:1-13  
Northminster Presbyterian Church  
October 22, 2017  
Rev. Michael D. Kirby**

Don't read in the dark... Don't sit so close to the television ...Wear your sunglasses when you drive...Take the drops for your Macular degeneration...Donate to the Eye Bank...Wear safety goggles in the lab...Don't look at the eclipse.

We have a lot of rules to protect our vision, to make sure that when we need to see something we will be able to. We wear glasses and contacts and have laser and cataract surgery — all to improve our vision.

This time of year is a very visual time, at least for me. The changing of the seasons does something to the light in the mornings and early afternoons. And this is the time of year I love to just wander through our community — looking, watching, observing.

There is so much to look at — sunrise on the lake, art, architecture, the amazing diversity of people just along Main Street in Southeast Evanston where I live. It's also a time when we're using our eyes more to take in information and entertainment — the potential Oscar contenders start drawing us back to movies; a new season of shows on TV and online try to draw us back to our screens; it's even the time when many new books are released for year-end, best-of-list purchases; and it's the beginning of the season for Christmas giving.

We are doing a lot of looking this time of year. But do we take the time to really see who and what are right in front of our faces? To really notice the little things that can be so moving, so beautiful? To really look beyond the facade to what is really there?

It was said of Michelangelo that he could look at a block of stone and see the sculpture hiding there. And it is also said, perhaps apocryphally, that he said all he did was remove what wasn't supposed to be there to reveal what God had placed in the stone.

On the cover of today's bulletin we have what is probably his most famous sculpture. Seeing it was thrilling. It's breathtaking and much larger than you would expect — far larger than life size. And the main portion that is on the cover — when you see it, I promise you, you almost expect him to breathe.

And then you look down and see the hand that is in the inset. It was the only way I could show it and keep the cover PG rated. When you look at that hand (which holds the stones David will use to kill Goliath) you notice that something is wrong. It's too big; it's out of proportion. There has been much speculation about that. Was it because the hand was big enough to slay Goliath? Was it forced perspective, as the statue was originally planned to be higher on an exterior building? Was it because of a carving error? Or was it because David would prove to be a flawed man, a great

king, but a flawed man, and the power— the earthly power that he would use to kill Goliath — would grow too attractive to him and he would misuse it? Maybe that's why the hand doesn't fit; isn't right. But first David will be the King that Yahweh wanted.

It certainly didn't start out that way. It started with Samuel, who was secretly looking for a new king while the old king, Saul, was busy making a mess of things. And in today's passage, Samuel confronts a vision problem — his own and his nation's. He didn't want to be out there looking for a new king in the first place. Why did he have to be the one to take the risk? Why didn't Yahweh just tell him who to anoint? Why play this game of trekking all the way to Judah, halfway misleading the elders, and parading the sons of Jesse like cattle or a beauty pageant?

Still, Samuel was trying as hard as he could. He had done this before with Saul, and he was pretty sure he knew what God was looking for. After all, surely God would be looking for the same thing, just a new and improved version. And besides, Samuel was no fool. He knew what a leader was supposed to look like. And what a leader was supposed to look like was Eliab. The moment Samuel saw him, he knew, this was the one. I wonder what Eliab looked like. We aren't really told. Given that we know that Saul was a strong, commanding figure, we imagine Eliab was more of the same — chiseled features, hair that looks like it's blowing in the breeze even when there isn't one, a cleft in his chin and really good teeth, sort of like Superman without the cape and with a circumcision scar — kind of Jew-Perman. But Samuel is wrong. That is not what or who God is looking for. And God is patient enough to wait for the right one. God wasn't concerned with all those physical characteristics that created the illusion of strength and power. David is scrawny and has beautiful eyes — not a very manly word is used there, a word that has with only one exception only been used to describe women or cows. It's almost as though the writer wants us to think — pretty, not leadership material.

But today, in Yahweh's choosing, earthly assumptions of how those God calls are supposed to look, and even act, are called into question. God's rejection of the "new Saul" is evidence that just looking at the past and how God was working then doesn't always reveal God's will for us today.

The old kind of king didn't work. Saul is a disaster. And so God reminds Samuel that our way of being — and God's way of being, and seeing — are very different. It's as if God says: we picked your way last time and now we'll pick MY way.

When calling, God is freed from the shackles of prejudice and expectation. God explains, "Samuel, you mortals look and all you see is what your eyes tell you. But I look and I really see what the heart reveals." I wonder which heart God is talking about. Some say God's heart is changed by an encounter with David and so God is saying, "My heart reveals this is the one." More say that God knows what is going on in the heart and mind of Eliab and David, and God knows that David is the right one. And if that's true, then God knows what our hearts reveal too.

God chooses David, the eighth-born, sheep-smelling nobody with a sunburn, beautiful eyes and a pretty-boy face, who is, in his own family and in his culture, an outsider. In this way David is like so many of the women and men called by God throughout the history of scripture — second sons Isaac and Jacob, the foreigner Ruth, the powerless Esther, the barren Rahab.

What did God see in David? Certainly not perfection. David's life and reign will be marked by more than its share of mistakes, sin and pain for God. Perhaps God's heart-focused vision saw what we see in the stories of David that dominate the rest of 1 Samuel and all of 2 Samuel — David's capacity to love, to love and serve God, to love and serve Israel, to love and serve others — Michal, Jonathan and even Saul.

Are we any better than Samuel at not just looking, but seeing? Are we able to look beyond appearances, to set aside our expectations and look to the hearts of one another? More important, are we willing to let God do that? Are we willing to let God look at each of us and all of us and say — you, that church on edge of Evanston, Skokie and Wilmette; you, that overworked young professional; you that over-committed early retiree — I see you and I call YOU!

But what could God see in us? Perhaps, if we are asking ourselves that, perhaps we are still sitting in the darkness of our own prejudices and worldly expectations just like Samuel.

A man sat at a metro station in Washington DC and started to play the violin; it was a cold January morning. He played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. During that time, since it was rush hour, it was calculated that thousands of people went through the station, most of them on their way to work. Three minutes went by and a middle-aged man noticed there was musician playing. He slowed his pace and stopped for a few seconds and then hurried up to meet his schedule. A minute later, the violinist received his first dollar tip. A woman threw the money in the open violin case and without stopping continued to walk. A few minutes later, someone leaned against the wall to listen to him, but the man looked at his watch and started to walk again. Clearly he was late for work.

The one who paid the most attention was a three-year-old boy. His mother dragged him along and hurried him, but the little one stopped to take in the violinist. Finally the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk turning his head all the time. This action was repeated by several other children. All the parents, without exception, forced them to move on.

In the 45 minutes the musician played, only six people stopped and stayed for a while. About 20 gave him money but continued to walk their normal pace. He collected \$32. When he finished playing and silence took over, no one noticed it. No one applauded, nor was there any recognition. No one knew this but the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the top musicians in the world. He played some of the most intricate pieces ever written with a violin worth 3.5 million dollars. Two days before his playing in the subway, Joshua Bell sold out at a theater in Boston with the seats AVERAGING \$100 each.

People walking by saw what they wanted to see, just another subway musician, not the dazzling talent who is considered one of the greatest living violinists.

Today God shines a light on Samuel's prejudice and our own, a light that reveals that things are not always as they appear. It's a light that reveals the world in a different way — a heartlight, to borrow a word from Kenny Loggins, a light that in seeing things differently, changes the world.

We are a couple of months away from considering that light — that way of seeing. That light, like David's ministry, which began in Bethlehem and was set blazing on Golgotha's hill today continues to burn from an empty tomb. Can we let that light, that way of seeing, light a way for us? More important, can we see it shining on us? God can. God can and does look at each of us and maybe our imperfections are easier to see than David's poorly proportioned hand. But still, I'm convinced that God is calling us into a common ministry together.

Our Reformed Tradition tells us that God calls who God wants to call.... In a priesthood of all believers there is not one of us who is anointed to be more important or special than any other. But we are all called to our particular ministries. And that's true for us as an imperfect community as well.

Today we will elect women and men who have discerned God's call to particular service as elders and deacons. In each of them God sees a new David, sees new talents and abilities and commitments that can together lead us, guide us and care for us. But what if they aren't the only ones being called today? What if we as a community are also being called into particular service? Your session has been trying to listen for that calling and the Challenge Budget they have set before us is their best effort at discerning the priorities and ministries to which God is calling Northminster.

To what is God calling you today? Not just how God might be calling you to participate in our common ministry together with your time and passions and financial support, as important as that is. What does God see in you that perhaps others can't see? I invite all of us to spend time in discerning that, not just in this season but every day.

God called the flawed, imperfect, yet beautiful David and a nation was reborn. God called Joshua Bell and he makes beauty of kindling and catgut. And David's new nation would eventually birth the Savior of the world.

We are the flawed, imperfect, beautiful seekers of Christ. What might God do through each of us, and all of us serving and working together? I can't wait to find out.