

1 SAMUEL 16:1-13
WHAT DOES GOD SEE IN US?

I was walking down Lothian Road, through crowds of people hurrying up and down, going home and going shopping, with a general melee of people rushing one way and the other. I watched an elderly lady struggle up the other side of the street with shopping bags, two or three of them, and they were clearly heavy. She obviously wanted to cross the road but didn't have a free hand to press the crossing button; she wanted to come to the side of the street where I was walking. As I watched, a young man came up behind her; he was wearing a hoody, listening to music, his jeans were ripped, his shoes were falling apart, he hadn't shaved for a few days and he came up behind the woman and I began to fear for her; would he take advantage of her situation, and steal her bag? He spoke to her; he obviously offered to help her. He pressed the crossing button and helped her across the road when the lights changed. What you see is not always what is going on inside! We often make judgements on what we see; how often do we get it wrong!

"Just" is a word that has all sorts of meanings. It can be the most demeaning word when it is used in one particular way. "She's just a woman!" "He's just a teenager". "She's just an old woman!" "He's just an old man!" "He's just my husband!" "She's just a secretary!" You get the idea. You will even hear people say it about themselves: "I'm just old!" and it is such a demeaning way of speaking about someone, it drags them down, it makes them seem ordinary, even useless and if you tell people often enough that they are "just ordinary" they will start to believe that they are useless, that being ordinary is a crime against the rest of us and you should go away, hide in a corner and not bother the rest of us who are good at things! All of that is contained in that little word "just" – "I am just a housewife!" How can one word be so demeaning? We're going to think about this today and put alongside two pieces of the Bible; story of David; and Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1, where he describes the people whom God chooses to be His Church.

It is a brilliant piece of story-telling: it builds up the story as Samuel goes to Bethlehem, meets Jesse and his sons, finds doors closed against him to start with because there is none to choose and then finally he finds the one whom God has chosen; only at end of story do we discover who is chosen: "*from that...*" (1 Samuel 16:13) The climax of the story is the name of the new king: David is chosen. One day, David will go on to be the greatest King Israel ever had, famous, celebrated. But it didn't start out that way. God was in story all the way through, from beginning to end, through the golden days when everything went really well for David and in the days when the wheels fell off and he had to start all over again. Samuel sees nothing of that, but some he has some sense from God that the young man standing in front of him is God's choice to be King. His name is David.

David didn't start off as a great, celebrated person. When Samuel is stuck, and has seen all of Jesse's sons, he says: "*Are these...*" (1 Samuel 16:11) When Jesse speaks about "the youngest" there is more to that word than age. He's right, of course, David is the youngest son; there is no getting away from the fact! But connected with age in the word the story uses is another sense of 'insignificant, unimportant'. David is the youngest son and so is quite unimportant in the life of Jesse's family; he doesn't count for very much, he is certainly not worthy of the company of the great prophet Samuel; so he's been left outside. Not only that, but the job he does is insignificant; he's looking after the sheep; "where can we put David so that he will do the least damage? Let's give him the sheep to look after". We see some more of this in the next chapter, in the Goliath story: David goes to visit his brothers who are lined up in Saul's army and he hears Goliath's challenge and sees

no-one responding. David seems to volunteer, but Eliab has so many ways of putting David down: “Who are you to think... full of conceit to think that you... wicked heart... who did you leave looking after sheep...” “It’s just David; he’s just boy!” Do you see yourself in the story of David?

God chooses David! We’re not told how Samuel knew; was there some Spirit-given sense that God was at work in David, perhaps? Whatever it was, Samuel sensed that God was at work and that David was God’s choice to be king and so he is anointed. Samuel takes the bottle of oil that he carried with him for this occasion and pours it over David’s head; the sign that he is set apart for special office in the kingdom of God. It would take a long time to happen and there would be lots of humps and bumps, twists and turns along the way, but one day David would be king, the God-anointed ruler of his people. It all began with the youngest, most insignificant son.

In case you think that this is just a one-off story and somehow only applies to David, see what Paul says about the people who form the church in its early days. The gospel is preached in Corinth, and makes an impact on people there; God is at work to attract people to Jesus to believe and the Spirit is at work to found and create the church founded on the gospel. “*Brothers, think...*” (1 Corinthians 1:26f) The world is full of wise people, people who know how things work and what things mean and all the details of the latest philosophy of life; they are delighted when the latest book sells millions of copies and they have 1000’s of followers on Twitter; we say “I don’t understand these things; I’m just an ordinary person”. Who are the influential people in our culture? The celebrities? These are the people we follow: we dress like them, we buy the same handbags, or shoes; drive a car because so-and-so drives one; these are the people who shape our culture, the way people think, what people like, how people behave; we say “I’m ordinary; no-one follows me!” We still take account of where someone was born; people of noble birth were the powerful people in the First century; they belonged; they had a place in government; they were the ones who counted, as citizens of Rome, that counted for everything; we say “I was born in a single-end cottage; I’m just nobody!” When Jesus was asked about the “Greatest in His kingdom” it was a little child He brought to the front!”

God turns everything around in His kingdom. “*Brothers, think...*” (1 Corinthians 1:26f) The word “foolish” and the others that go with it should be in inverted commas to show that Paul is talking about the opinions of others; this is not what God thinks; this is not how things are! God chose people the world thought foolish and turned them into His Church; God chose people world thought to be rubbish and called them special and beloved and turned them into His church. The Kingdom of God works with different values; ordinary people are counted as special. There is no place for the word “just” in God’s vocabulary. He looks on all of us and sees a human being made bearing His image and sees someone special; He looks on all of us and sees a human being whom He loves and for whom Jesus has died and sees potential to be a great person! This is us! We are that Church. Not many of us write books about the way the world works; not many of us have thousands of Twitter followers; not many of us are fashion icons; not many of us have noble blood; not many of us have positions of power in Scotland today. But we are the people of God, the people whom God has chosen. The thing about being wise, or influential, or noble – these things engender pride; these are the things we’re proud of. There is only one boast allowed in the kingdom of God – the boast that Jesus is our Saviour and Lord. That is the boast that comes from faith, from seeing what God has done for us and the new status that God has given us. This is who we are; the people of God. David gives the lie to the word “just”; so too do we; don’t demean anyone, even yourself with “just”!

"The Lord..." (1 Samuel 16:7) "Ah well, at least his heart is in the right place!" We say that as the saving grace of someone's life; when there is nothing else good to say about them we say "Ah well, at least his heart is in the right place!" It is the one redeeming feature of a lost life or a life of someone who's made lots of mistakes and made a mess of everything "Ah well, at least his heart is in the right place!" What, for us, is the last redeeming feature, the saving grace, for God is what counts most! Where is our heart? What is in our hearts? What kind of person, inside, is Joe Bloggs? That's the question God asks. When He looked at David what did God see? Everyone else saw David as the youngest, most insignificant; God must have seen something different. We're not really told what God saw, but we have to imagine that God saw a young man of faith, who trusted God; a humble young man who had the right view of himself and others; a young man ready to serve, ready to do the will of God, to walk in God's ways. God must have seen something of that in David; that is what he would become and the rest of his story shows us all of these qualities in his life; both his story and the psalms and prayers that he wrote show us a man of faith, who trusted God, a humble man who was ready to serve and do the will of God. He wasn't perfect, but then he was human!

What does God see in us? Some might answer "nothing" to that, but that's not the right answer! What is God looking for in us? This is all about qualities; this is not about bank balances, fashion sense, even achievements; this all, entirely, totally, completely about qualities! This is the challenge of God looking at us inside! He wants to see a heart of faith: a person who is learning to believe in Jesus and to trust Jesus as Saviour and Lord; this is a lifelong enterprise, learning to believe and to trust, and there is no expectation that we'll be perfect at it, but God is looking for a heart that beats with faith and trust. He wants to see a humble heart: a person who has the right idea of her/himself and that humility shapes our relationship with God and our relationships with other people; we are to be humble to live by faith, to admit our faults and mistakes, humble to receive forgiveness from God; humble to love and serve others and let others love and serve us. He wants to see a heart that is ready to serve: we don't do the will of God perfectly, but it is enough for God that we want to do His will, He is happy at that! He wants to see us ready to serve God and in serving God, to serve one another. These are the qualities that God wants to see in us; He looks at our hearts – what does He see?

David – the last word of the story; his name. it came to be the name of a great King, a man of God, a man of faith; but at the beginning, he was "just" the youngest in his family; he was "just" looking after the sheep, because he would do least damage there. The kingdom of God is made up of a "company of people with ascertainable names and addresses", people like you and me, people the world describes as "just ordinary". But God has chosen us to be His people; we are special in His eyes, a people whom He loves, a people who belong to Him. The challenge for us to be people with faith in our hearts, trusting Jesus; humble people; people who are ready to serve the Lord and walk in His ways. These are the qualities that God wants to see in us when He looks at our hearts; is your heart in the right place, loving God, loving others? "In my insignificant, sheep-keeping obscurity, I am chosen!" Can we see ourselves here?