

4th Sunday in Lent (A)

Seeing as God Sees

1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

God has decided that Israel needs a new king and has given Samuel the task of finding him. Samuel is sent to the family of Jesse, where seven of Jesse's sons are presented to him. They are an impressive line-up, yet each time Samuel thinks he has found the right one, God says, "No — not this one." By the time he reaches the seventh and still hears no from God, Samuel must have wondered what to do next. So he asks Jesse if there are any more sons. "Yes — there's the youngest, David, but he's out looking after the sheep." Samuel calls for him, and the moment David arrives, Samuel knows: this is God's choice.

God's choice is almost a 'nobody' — an afterthought — just a boy out in the paddocks tending sheep. God's point is clear: "I look at people differently than humans do. Humans look at the outward appearance, but I look into the heart."

God doesn't see as we see. We tend to focus on externals — appearance, status, money, perceived success. I catch myself doing it. God's word to Samuel reminds us that God looks deeper, seeing value we may overlook. Which raises a question: How do we see each other? How do we see those in our communities — those we hope to reach and serve? What are we missing when we judge by externals? How might we learn to see as God sees?

God often uses the ones we overlook — the ones we think aren't ready, wise enough, experienced enough, or capable enough. That's what happens here. God chooses a young shepherd with no qualifications and no greatness attached to his name. We can be blind to others' potential — and even to our own. We say, "It's only them," or, "It's only me." But God sees something more. That challenges the way I look at others and makes me wonder: What am I missing? What am I not seeing?

The Gospel story echoes this theme. Jesus gives sight to a man born blind — a man pushed to the margins, ignored, dismissed as a nuisance. In those days, people assumed disabilities were caused by sin. But Jesus sees differently. He uses this encounter to reveal God's power. The man is healed and declares, "Lord, I believe." Meanwhile, the religious authorities — those presumed to have spiritual insight — are themselves spiritually blind. Their preconceptions and prejudices prevent them from seeing what God is doing. The very people who ought to understand are the ones in the dark. Once again, a forgotten nobody becomes the one who sees God's grace most clearly.

And things haven't changed all that much. It is still easy to be blind to what God is doing around us — in our community, in our parish, even in the world. Circumstances often present as fears, anxieties, or challenges. But then I find myself asking: What might God be seeing in this situation? How might we work with God to discover something new and creative where others see only chaos or threat?

The story of God's transforming love isn't finished. God longs to continue shaping us, doing new things with us. Yet we may tell ourselves we don't matter, or what we do doesn't count, or that a situation is hopeless. But if all we can see is what's on the surface, we're in trouble. Seeing as God sees means looking beyond appearances — seeing into the heart of people and situations, and leaning into imagination until we glimpse a deeper reality: what God sees.

This applies to our future as a faith community, to our personal lives and ministries, to our wider community and nation. Will we allow surface appearances to define us? Or will we trust that God continues to do creative things through us and with us? This isn't about denying challenges, but opening ourselves to what I would call holy imagination. I don't know what the future holds, but I do know that God goes with us and, as David wrote, makes us lie down in green pastures, restores our souls, and guides our way. God's goodness and mercy follow us.

We have a choice. Ephesians puts it plainly: we can continue in darkness, or we can live as children of the light. This doesn't give us neat answers or a blueprint. Instead, it prompts a question: Are we willing to pray for the vision to see as God sees — to look beyond conditions as they are and peer into the heart — to lean into imagination until new possibilities emerge? Are we prepared to see situations, dynamics, and each other with different eyes, and notice new potential — new possibilities?

My prayer is that we, like Samuel, and allow God to show us something new in the unlikeliest situations, places, and people. When David stood before Samuel, God said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." These words still echo. God looks at each of us today and says, "This is the one." You and I are the ones God chooses to work with. And so, like the man born blind, we respond in faith: "Lord, I believe."

God of healing and sight,
open our eyes to see as you see.
Guide our steps in your light,
strengthen us in hope,
and lead us into the future you are shaping.
Fill us with your peace,
and bless us as we go on our way.

Alister Hendery
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