

The Rev. Dean Lindsey

June 14, 2009

Looking Deeper to See God's Plan

The Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

James 2:1-5, 8-9

“The Lord does not see as people see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” To those words, I think we can all add an ‘Amen.’

“The Lord does not see as people see.”

“Thank goodness,” is what I want to say, because we can do a terrible job.

When we consider another person we are forever prone to misjudgment. One word for this is prejudice. In essence, it means to pre-judge someone else. To make up our mind about another person before we know much of anything about them.

It's a natural thing to do. It helps us prepare, to get ready for an encounter that lies ahead. If I am a job hunter on my way to an interview in downtown Chicago, I am definitely going to prejudge the situation and the person with whom I will be meeting. Ahead of time, I am thinking hard about what he or she values, what interests she might have, what topics I should talk to her about. If, on the other hand, I am the one doing the interview, I will have done some serious pre-judging, too. I will have formed some opinions about the job-seeker, and I am

going to create my first several questions based on those judgments, those prejudices, if you will.

The real problems come when we hang onto those pre-judgments despite plenty of evidence to the contrary, when we continue to look for something that will confirm our opinion rather than trying to understand who a person really is.

I know that in my life I have badly misjudged people from time to time, but I'm not the only one.

Some of the greatest names in business and sports, science and entertainment were misjudged somewhere along the way. Thomas Edison was the youngest of seven children. An early teacher said he was “addled,” and “too stupid to learn.” One of Albert Einstein’s teachers said he was “mentally slow, unsociable, and adrift forever in foolish dreams.” Later the winner of many professional tennis matches, a young Stan Smith wasn’t allowed to be a ball boy at the Davis Cup, because someone thought he was too awkward and clumsy. When Fred Astaire went for his first screen test, the person who evaluated him wrote, “Can’t act. Can’t sing. Slightly bald. Can dance a little.” Astaire kept a copy of that memo on his mantle.

These are all relatively modern examples of grossly underestimating the potential of someone who would become truly great. Someone with unrecognized talent, or intelligence, or heart. Someone like David of Bethlehem, the son of Jesse.

For a number of weeks this summer, Beth Hilkerbaumer and I will be preaching on the stories of David in the Old Testament. There are many such stories. His biography stretches across four of the longest books of the Bible. He receives mention nearly 600 times in Scripture, including a number of references to him in the gospels which explicitly connect Jesus to this ancient king. David is an important figure for Christians and Jews, and if we are going to have a good grasp of our Biblical faith, there is no avoiding him.

And what better place to start than right here at the beginning, the beginning of his story, or at least the first time we hear of him?

This week, during our MarketPlace program for the children, I retold the story of David's anointing. It was a lot of fun to act out this story with the kids. I played the part of Samuel. I have a pretty wild-looking costume beard that I used. Don't be alarmed if you see any pictures of it! Jake Youngman had a costume beard too, so he played the part of Jesse, the father. And we lined up all of the sons of Jesse for me (Samuel) to ask God which one he had chosen. First in line was Cole Chana, one of our youth helpers. We were so glad to have Cole with us, especially since he and his family have been through some very hard days. If you don't know him, Cole is a very big young man. He towers over me, and he does body building for fun. Like Eliab in the Bible story, Cole looked the part of a king-to-be.

“Not the one,” I had to say. “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature . . . for the Lord does not see as people see.” And so we went stairstepping down the line from tallest to shortest, oldest to youngest until the line was finished. So, of course, I had to ask the question, “Are there any more sons?” And Jesse called in young David, played by Max Garmin—one of the youngest boys in the room, not much more than waist high on me. He would be our king.

From childhood on, I think we all learn to love this story, because it is a complete reversal of a common life experience: at some point, we’ve all been younger than someone else, or less experienced, or smaller, or weaker. And we have been passed over, left out, judged as inadequate, according to some arbitrary standard we could never match.

Because of those experiences, we tend to identify ourselves with David, the young one, rejected at first, but later celebrated. But, theologically speaking, there is a lot more going on in this story. It’s not simply about including someone who was formerly left out. It’s also about a series of rejections, starting with tall and handsome Eliab and going through Eliab, Abinadab and four other unnamed brothers of David. A message we discover in this story is that God chooses one over the others. To put it bluntly, God plays favorites.

We find this pattern throughout the Old Testament. God chooses Abraham and Sarah. It is not a choice for some other man. It is not a choice for some other

woman. It is God's choice for this particular couple who will bear the covenant promises. God chooses Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel. The list goes on, for it is the story of the Jewish people, chosen by God from among all the people, to be instruments of grace.

The New Testament picks up this same theme of election. Through Christ, we the church are included in God's covenant plan.

An important thing to remember is that God's choice defies all expectations. No one can anticipate it, because God seems to abandon all of the normal measures that we commonly focus on: wealth, power, position, and all the rest. God's choices are unlike human choices. That's why the experts so often guess wrong. That is why the pre-judgements are so likely to be mistaken.

It is also important to remember that in God's plan, no one can claim a special status. God's choice is not based on human deserving. God's choice is based on what God desires for all people. Election is not for personal or even corporate glory. It is to glorify God, and the work of those elected is to share God's love. That is why God makes a choice for David. That is why God makes a choice for Israel. That is why God makes a choice for the church.

Unfortunately, it is so easy to fail in the important task of sharing God's love. David himself has high points and low ones, moments of great obedience and disobedience, righteousness and complete sinfulness. His life is marked by both

triumph and tragedy. Over the coming weeks, we'll have an opportunity to look more closely at some of those stories. But, from the start, we learn that David has a heart, and a passion for God. We may underestimate the possibilities which that passion holds, but God knows, and God has a plan.

I find so often in our Christian life, we are prejudiced against our own potential.

I am just one person. I have so little to offer. I wouldn't even know how to begin to do something great for the Lord.

But, God chose David, young David, and there was little to recommend him.

In the churches, too, our pre-judgments simply ignore the power of God's election.

We're just a small church in a great, big metropolitan area. What difference can we make?

Remember, God chose David.

Our resources are limited. There are pressures upon us. We live in a culture where our neighbors may not care about what we are doing.

But, God chose David.

And God chose us. God chose us.

It's hard to say why exactly. But, God believes something good will happen here, some kindness, some love, some mercy, some grace. Let me re-phrase that: a

lot of kindness, a lot of love, a lot of mercy, a lot of grace. Never underestimate the power of God's choice.