

Mark 4: 30-32

³⁰Jesus also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?”

³¹It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³²yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

1 Samuel 15: 34 - 16:13

³⁴Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul. ³⁵Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord was sorry to have chosen Saul to be king over Israel.

The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” ²Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.” And the Lord said, *“Take a heifer with you, and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’* ³*Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.”*

⁴Samuel did what the Lord commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, “Do you come peaceably?” ⁵Samuel said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. ⁶When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the Lord.”

⁷But the Lord said to Samuel, *“Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”*

⁸Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” ⁹Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” ¹⁰Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.” ¹¹Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And

Jesse said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." ¹²He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "*Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.*" ¹³Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

One: Friends, this is the Word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God.

"God's Guiding Hand"

I used to be a big fan of those TV singing competitions; I might have even voted for an American Idol once or twice. But my interest waned after Britain's Got Talent dropped the microphone and won the internet in the person of Susan Boyle.

As you can still see on the YouTube video, when Ms. Boyle walked onto the stage it was pretty apparent what the judges and audience thought about this contestant. Everyone just "knew" she was going to be a loser and that this was going to be a sad spectacle of epic proportions. She definitely did not look like the regular television contestant...she appeared to be unkempt with unruly hair and bushy eyebrows. Her conversation with the judges didn't help the situation either, she was easily tongue-tied and quirky, trying too hard to be funny and memorable — she seemed, well, quirky.

That is until she sang... when the music started and she lifted her voice every last person in the audience—including all three judges —melted over Boyle's powerful voice. The video of the performance went viral within hours of the performance, propelling Susan Boyle to international fame.

When I read today's old testament passage I immediately thought of Susan Boyle because no one thought that this person, the one no one thought would amount to much, would end up capturing the attention and affection of the world. In today's passage from 1st Samuel we encounter the Prophet Samuel as he is struggling with the outcome of the people's cries for a king. The text tells us that Samuel grieved for Saul and that God was "sorry to have made Saul king of Israel"

You see, Saul, the "populist, tough-guy" king that the people demanded, did exactly what God warned he would do - he became enraptured by his own power, he drafted soldiers, he drifted away from the designs God had made for the chosen people by giving burnt offerings to foreign gods and by allowing his soldiers to claim spoils from wars - all in the name of honoring God.

God had enough and God wasn't going to tolerate it. God said to Samuel, We're going in a different direction; it's time we find someone else. In response to the repeated failures of this Chosen King, Samuel grieves... but God does allow him to wallow in misplaced grief; God moves Samuel forward into a new beginning for God's people.

This new beginning leads him to the home of Jesse, the Bethlehemite. There he finds what looks to be an easy choice for a new king. Seven picture perfect sons ready and waiting for the sacrifice Samuel is preparing.

It would have been customary to present your sons to a visitor such as Samuel, but I imagine Jesse was wondering why Samuel was taking such interest in his sons as he parades them before his guest. "Surely, this is the one! Samuel thinks to himself, as Jesse's impressive sons are paraded before him, one after another. Not so much, God replies. "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature... for God does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart." Finally, Samuel asks his host, Is that it? No more sons? Jesse sort of shrugs his shoulders, and says, "well, there's my youngest, but we didn't bother to bring him in. For one thing, he's keeping the sheep." This tells us so much about the son—whose name has not even been mentioned yet. The youngest, therefore the lowest in the family pecking order, not even worthy of meeting the prophet.

The fact is, David was the youngest child, and in the Ancient Near East that fact automatically rendered him second class. Even if David was the most handsome of all the boys, his status as last-born would have meant that he could expect no privileges, no particular advantage over the older siblings.

But, as Samuel tells us, God judges the heart. There is nothing about David's status in the world that suggests he should be King. He is a shepherd boy, ignored even by his own family, yet it is upon David that God builds the Kingdom. Like the mustard seed, David is not expected to do much in the world. But it is from these smallest, most overlooked parts of our world that God brings forth God's purposes. In Saul, God rejected the pretty and powerful whose hearts knew nothing of God's intentions for the world.

This is especially good news for those who are not 'credentialed.' Those that have no business changing the world are the ones God chooses to do just that. Those who appear to have no power in the world are the ones we see spreading their wings and providing shade and shelter for those who are looking for respite and safety.

There seems to be a lot of that going on right now in our world; lots of "un-credentialed" people who are taking steps to challenge the Sauls of this world. I see this in the young people who flooded the Tennessee State House after gun violence touched their lives. Those young rose up and demanded action - not for themselves, but for children, youth, and adults

everywhere in that state who have been rendered voiceless in the fight to turn weapons into plowshares. I think about the everyday women and men across this country who are standing with the poor and dispossessed as they advocate for systemic change in the hallways of power in this nation.

God's actions to claim and anoint David, affirms that God's providence operates beyond the spectrum in which our sight operates, but even so WE remain within God's view. The God of Israel is forever proving that good things come in unlikely wrappings and from unlikely origins. This is the God, after all, who preferred Abel over his older brother Cain; who made an everlasting Covenant with a couple of childless senior citizens; This is the God who chose Jacob over Esau, Joseph over all of his older brothers. So, I say to you, those of you who are lifelong members as well as those of who are here visiting for the first time:

You are anointed, each and every one of you. You are anointed to God's service. You might feel like the Susan Boyles of this world, you might feel like David, unworthy to even speak to God's messengers who are around you; You might feel un-credentialed to do anything for God. You look might look on yourself and see all the faults and failures and hesitations that come from measuring yourself by worldly standards, but God does not see as we see. God looks deeper; deeper into our hearts and sees through our faults and failures to the goodness that was planted in us by God's love. **YOU ARE ANOINTED!**

You are anointed to spread your branches to provide shade and comfort to all God's children. So go out into this world to live and love trusting that God is working through the moments of your life to open up God's reign for all people. You might not always understand it, you might just be reacting to what you see, but God is in those moments shaping God's hope and God's love for this world through your hearts and minds and bodies.

May it be so.

Amen.