

“DIVINE POSSIBILITIES: SEEING WITH GOD’S EYES”

(1 Samuel 16:1-13)

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–I–

1. [COMBINED Camp Meeting Service] Read NRSV Text: 1 Samuel 16:1-13 and Pray.

2. [STORY OF QUAKER AND MAN WITH UMBRELLAS]

An executive went to work one day on the bus and sat next to a Quaker. As they traveled along, it started to rain heavily outside. And although the executive had heard the forecast for rain, he had nonetheless forgotten to bring along his umbrella. However, in the rush of getting off the bus at his stop, the executive accidentally picked up the Quaker's umbrella, forgetting that he had neglected to bring his own. Noticing the man do this, the Quaker politely, but firmly caught up to the man, tapped him on the shoulder, and said, "*Sir, I believe thou hast my umbrella.*"

Embarrassed, the man apologized, gave it back, and went on his way to work through the rain. Later at the office, the executive discovered 6 umbrellas in his closet that he had neglected to bring home with him on other rainy days. So, at the end of the day, he decided to take all of them home.

He boarded a crowded bus and grabbed a hand-rail for the long trip home, holding all 6 umbrellas tucked under his arm. Soon, he felt a tap on his shoulder. When he turned around, he was surprised to see the same Quaker man that he had met earlier that day. And, pointing at the 6 umbrellas, with a stern voice, the Quaker said, "*Sir, I see that thou hast had a good day.*"

3. Well, things aren't always as they appear, are they? Outward looks *can* be deceiving, and at times can severely distort reality.

A–Consider, for example, our tendency to think that if someone always dresses sharp and neat, lives in a nice home, drives a nice car, has what appears to be a “solid” marriage, and are good “church folk,” that they’ve got it all “together”!

1–But how many of us here can tell true stories about neighbors or friends who fit that description, but who’s life ended up in tragedy: ...the popular community doctor who commits suicide; a church family fight that turns into violence; the bankruptcy of a influential business-man that drives them to abandon their marriage, their family, their church, and their God?

2–And after it happens, we all stand around shocked and surprised because “*they were such good, upstanding people.*”

B–You know, when I first became an ordained pastor, I worked in a church where most of the youth attended a private school.

1–And I once asked one of the parents why their kids weren't in public schools, and was both amused and saddened by their response:

2–For them, it didn't have anything to do with getting a “better” education, or being in an environment where their kids could learn Christian values, or anything like that.

3–No. The reason they shared was: “*We don't want our kids associating with the kind of kids who attend public schools.*”

4–As I delved deeper, I discovered that what that referred to was an assumption that the public schools around them were full of kids who had problems with drugs, alcohol, and other issues.

5–And my amusement was due to the fact that I knew from a teacher there that the drug and alcohol problem at *that* private school was just as bad (if not worse) than what was happening in the public schools – those parents were just blind to it!

4. Now, I'm not knocking private schools, but my point again is... “*Looks can be deceiving.*”

A–Good people, angels with a heart of gold, often appear in the outward form of the poor, the downtrodden, the outcasts of society,...

B–...While at the same time, people who're selfish, self-sufficient, self-centered, and self-indulgent often masquerade as “typical” middle-class Americans.

C–And while it IS human nature for us to have this kind of judgmental spirit which makes assumptions about others based *solely* on outward appearances,...

D–...Today's scripture from 1 Samuel 16 reminds us that God calls His followers to *rise above* human nature – to perceive and interact with others in a way that's fundamentally *different from* our natural instinct.

–II–

5. The story we heard read, of course, is where God tells the royal prophet Samuel that since He's rejected Saul as king, he (Samuel) is to travel to the small town of Bethlehem and anoint a *new* king from among the sons of a man there named Jesse.

A–And since Samuel doesn't want King Saul suspecting him of treason, he tells Saul that he's simply going to Bethlehem to offer a sacrifice.

B–When he arrives, he finds Jesse, and asks him to introduce all his sons, knowing that God will reveal which one of these he's to anoint as the new king.

1–Now, in those days, when you introduced your family, the custom was to begin with the most *important* one and work down to the *least* important.

2–So Verse 10 tells us that Jesse parades seven of his sons before Samuel, and that by all *outward* appearances, these seven were the *most likely* candidates to be anointed king: they were the strongest; the best looking; the tallest; the smartest.

3–But in each case, Samuel senses that God hasn't chosen *any* of these to be king.

7. So in Verse 11, he asks Jesse again: “*Are ALL your sons here? Isn't there more?*”

A–And almost as an afterthought, Jesse says, “*Well, there IS my youngest son; but he's only a small shepherd boy, and he's keeping the sheep now.*”

B–Samuel has Jesse send for him, anyway – and lo and behold, in Verse 12 God reveals to Samuel that this shepherd-boy (David) is the one *God* has chosen to be the new king.

C–So, Samuel anoints David (a sign of God's blessing), and as you know, David later becomes probably the most famous of all the kings of Israel.

8. Now, this is yet another example of how outward appearances (“looks”) can be deceiving:

A–David's Father and his brothers see in David only a small, weakling shepherd boy.

1--To them, he was merely the youngest son, of the lowest clan, in the smallest tribe of Israel.

2--But Verse 7 says, “*The Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the **heart**.*”

B–In other words, when all that David's father and brothers saw was a little shepherd boy, **GOD saw a king.**

1–While they were looking and judging David solely on *outward appearance*, Samuel was following *God's* lead by looking on David's *heart*.

2–When they were seeing David through their own *human* eyes, Samuel was seeing David through *God's* eyes.

C–Now, I don't know if you've caught it yet, but what have here, you see, is a story of “*Divine Possibilities*” – the theme you've been hearing about this past week and a half here at Camp Meeting 2011.

1–It's a story that says that you and I are not limited by the boundaries and restraints set by the *others* (or even sometimes by ourselves).

2–It’s a story which says that with God *anything* is possible, because God has a different perspective than we do, looking at our *hearts* rather than our *outward appearances* only.

9. And this is both good news and challenging news to those of us who claim to follow Jesus:

–III–

10. On the one hand, it’s **GOOD NEWS** because it reminds us that since God looks on our *hearts*, there’s hope for US.

A–Have there ever been times in your life when you’ve *felt* like a “nobody?” ...Perhaps even times when other people *called* you a “nobody” because of the color of your skin, or the way you dressed, or because of what you believed, or even perhaps because your words or actions didn’t match someone *else’s* expectations of what they should be?

1–Well, when *others* look at you and me and see only a shepherd-boy or girl (a “nobody”) we need to remember that what *God* sees is a king or queen!

2–When *others* look at us (and even when we look at *ourselves*) and see *only* our faults and shortcomings, we need to know that what *God* sees is our potential!

B–Some of you may know that within the great halls of many European castles hang beautiful, woven tapestries that fill the walls.

1–But while these tapestries are *beautiful* on the front side, if you turn them over, the back side is not pretty at all! The basic outline from the front is there, but its ragged and jumbled, with pieces of string sticking out all over!

2–Well, our *lives* are like those tapestries: ...all that we and others usually see is the imperfect, ragged side.

3–And yet, while God knows the imperfections we all have, what *He* sees is the beauty and perfection that we can *become* – He sees the “king” or “queen” within each one of us. He doesn’t just see a “*sinner*” – he sees a “*sinner saved by grace*.”

C–You see, this is “good news” for all of us – who (whether we admit it or not) often feel trapped by the unrealistic expectations and limitations placed on us by others.

11. At the same time, though, this call from God also brings **CHALLENGING NEWS**, because it reminds us that we have to be very careful about *our* judging of others.

A–In John 7:24, Jesus himself says, “*Do not judge by [outward] appearance, but judge with right judgment.*”

B–So my question is: Who do you and I judge by their outward appearance? Who do you judge by what they wear, or what kind of car they drive, or what neighborhood they live in? ...or by the kind of music they listen to? or get this... by what kind of music they sing in church? ...or what the style of preaching they prefer? ...or by how long they've lived here in Cobb County?

C–You see, when we start evaluating the worth or value of others based solely on predetermined standards set by ourselves or others, then we've crossed the line into hypocrisy, and are no better than Jesse and his sons in today's story, because we're viewing others only through *human* eyes, rather than through the eyes of *God*.

12. And yet, the good news is that, as people of faith, God calls us (and empowers us) to look *past* outward appearances to see the inner potential – to ask His Holy Spirit to help us see *beyond* human limitations, and instead see the “*Divine Possibilities*” in the lives of others.

A–You and I are the “kings” and “queens” of God's eyes, because He sees beyond who we *are* and sees who we *can become*.

B–So, my prayer is that we wrap up and go forth from Camp Meeting 2011, we would not only seek to discover and claim these “Divine Possibilities” for our *own* lives, but that we'll also do the same for others – we'll strive to “*See With God's Eyes*” the beauty and potential of *everyone* that we meet, and treat them accordingly!

13. [PRAY]

14. [HOLY COMMUNION]

14. [HYMN: #454, “Open My Eyes, That I May See”]