

Maturing of the Soul

March 22, 2020

1st Samuel 16: 1-13

¹ 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." ² Samuel 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."

⁴ Samuel 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?" ⁵ He 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. ⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is now before the LORD." ⁷ But 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."

⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ¹⁰ Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these."

¹¹ Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he 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."

¹² He 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."¹³ Then 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.

John 9: 1-41

¹ As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷ saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man."¹⁰ But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?"

¹¹ He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my

sight." ¹² They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." ¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.

¹⁴ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵ He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶ They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷ He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not

listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"

²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰ The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

³⁴ They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. ³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

³⁹ Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.



Welcome to a different and new world of Sunday morning worship. We have to acknowledge this new reality as I begin to share the message this morning. As we begin, let us pray...

As I begin this morning, please allow me to get everyone caught up to where we are in our Lenten sermon series, "Seasons of the Soul". Lent is traditionally a season of reflection and introspection where one seeks to grow closer to God by considering the state of our soul or soil. On Ash Wednesday we looked at preparing our soul for the coming season of growth in Lent. As we began, we looked at how we approach God. Do we do so in humility and with sincere heart or do we approach God with a fake piety that we hope others notice? Our case study involved the Pharisee and the tax collector. We learned that when we approach God, we should do so with a humble and contrite heart – like the tax collector. On the first Sunday of Lent, we walked with Jesus during his time in the wilderness, where Satan tempted him. As Jesus' faith did throughout the gospels, our faith also must rest upon a trust in God.

The next Sunday we first looked at Abram's obedience to God's call to leave his family and to follow God's direction to a new land. Because he trusted God and walked by faith, it that was credited to him as righteous. In the gospel lesson, Nicodemus, a religious leader, came to Jesus at night seeking to know more about true faith. Jesus taught him that he must be born again. Even though Nicodemus was a bit more than confused by Jesus' call to be born of the water and the Spirit, this conversation began Nicodemus on a journey of faith that would lead to him becoming a follower of Jesus. In his story we came to see our own story. We first become curious about Jesus and then we seek him out. Through getting to know Jesus, we too are born anew as Jesus becomes the Lord of our life. As our journey continues, we experience his cleansing power again and again as we confess, repent, and are made new over and over.

Last Sunday we celebrated Camp Sunday in our church. The Old Testament lesson centered on the Israelite's quarreling with Moses and testing God because they did not have water. Despite the people's lack of faith and trust, we saw that God, as he always is, was faithful and provided water in the desert. The New Testament story centered on the Samaritan woman at the well. In this story we saw Jesus' persistence as he worked past barrier after barrier to finally give this lost woman the gift of living water and faith in him as the Messiah. At times we too must be willing to step past barriers in order to share the love of Jesus with another. I shared a story about how a woman at the church used the little red kindness bags that we handed out the week before as an illustration of how the Holy Spirit will work in and through us if we are open to allowing that to happen. When we allow this to happen, we experience growth for our soul.

This morning, the overall theme of both of our passages is that we are often more than or different than we appear to be. In reality, when we describe someone, we tend to do so in physical terms – tall, short, beautiful, blind, black hair – and not with terms like intelligent, insightful, hardworking, talented. In our two passages for today we find men who have tremendous power – kings and king makers and sight givers. Samuel and Saul and Jesus all have a great deal of power. In our first passage that we read, from 1st Samuel 16, we first see that Samuel is afraid to venture out in public, fearful of what King Saul might do to him. Samuel has spoken truth about Saul, and he fears the repercussions of his words. Once God gives Samuel a plan, he heads to Bethlehem. But there we see that the elders of Bethlehem are scared of the man with power. They fear why Samuel might have come to their village. After being admitted under the guise of offering a sacrifice to God, Samuel gathers Jesse's sons to anoint the

next king of Israel. The purpose of the anointing is known only to God and to Samuel. Once Samuel is there, though, God rejects all of the sons who were older, stronger, and more mature. God speaks into the situation as all seven of the sons who are present pass before Samuel, reminding Samuel that *"the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart"*. We too can struggle with appearance. When looking for a potential sweetheart or spouse, do we not start by looking for someone beautiful or handsome? When looking for a new employee, do we not look at where they earned their college degree or at the high points of their resume to date? When looking at who to place on the roster, do we not look at the strongest, fastest, and biggest athletes first? We too, as Samuel did, tend to look first at outward appearances.

Picking the story up at verse eleven, after an awkward moment, Samuel asks Jesse, *"Are all your sons here"?* Only now do we learn that the youngest is still out in the fields tending the sheep. He is called for and they await his arrival. As David arrives, even then, Samuel first notes his appearance. God instructs Samuel to anoint David, for he is the one. God, ever the faithful one, pours out his anointing upon David as well. Reading verse 13 we read, *"the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward"*. This day begins a long journey for David as God prepares him to be the next king of Israel.

Now we turn to our second passage, to John 9, verses 1-41. This long passage is the story of how the Jews understood sin, of Jesus' healing power, and of the religious authorities fear of Jesus. The story begins as the disciples see a blind

man and they ask Jesus, "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind*"? Their question illustrates the Jewish understanding of sin at this time. Sin was understood as something that brought a consequence upon the sinner and upon the generations that would follow. The disciples wanted to know where the sin that caused the man to be born blind had originated. Jesus counters this understanding, explaining that sin does not cause blindness. In fact, he shares that this man was born blind so God's power might be revealed.

Without the man or anyone else asking, Jesus stoops down, spits into some dirt, and begins to make mud. Jesus spreads the mud on the blind man's eyes and instructs him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. As the man washes, his blindness is healed. His neighbors and others who have seen him begging marvel and wonder at how this might have happened. The man himself claims that he was indeed blind. He tells the story and ends up being brought to the Pharisees. In verse 14 we learn that the healing occurred on the Sabbath. As the man tells his story, the Pharisees begin arguing about Jesus. Some argue that Jesus could not be of God because he ignored the Sabbath laws. Others argue that he must be of God – look at what he has done for the blind man.

The Pharisees bring in the man's parents to corroborate that he was indeed born blind and to find out from them how their son now sees. Fearing the threat of being barred from the temple for showing belief in Jesus, they skirt the second question. The religious leaders then return to questioning the man himself. After a tense exchange, the man finally asks them, "*Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples*"? They do not take this well.

After the Pharisees again deny the assertion that Jesus is from God, the blind man becomes the one with power and authority. Hear his words of truth about Jesus. I'll be reading verses 30 through 33:

³⁰ "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

These words infuriate the religious leaders and they drive the man out of the temple. But Jesus finds the man and reveals to the man that he is the Son of Man. In verse 38 we hear the man's profession of faith as he says, "Lord, I believe". In response he worships Jesus. The man who was once blind did not come to faith based on Jesus' appearance or because of his reputation or because of any other physical or intellectual attribute. He did not come to know Jesus as Lord because of some grand display of power either. Jesus simply put a little mud on his eyes and told him to go wash in the pool.

The man who had been labeled a sinner now could see. That label was something he had born with shame all his life. "Sinner" has come to define who the man was. The label isolated and limited him. When others looked at him, that was all they saw. So, my friends, in many ways the removal of the label was something greater than the physical ability to see.

As we begin to understand how the scripture applies to our lives, we begin with two questions. The first: Who or what defines normal, respectable, acceptable, or whole today? The second: Are there still categories of clean and unclean, of sinner or righteous, of criminal or citizen, of welcome and



unwelcome? The way society would answer these questions and the way God or Jesus would answer these questions is the crux of the matter today. In some sense, part of me does not even think that God or Jesus considers questions like these. I say this because as we have seen during this series and as one discovers when one delves into Jesus' life and teachings, Jesus did not pay much attention to labels. Others labeled people sinners or prostitutes or adulterers or lepers or tax collectors or Samaritans... but Jesus never let an earthly label define someone. Like God instructed Samuel to do, Jesus looked at the heart. And looking at the heart, Jesus ministered however he could to draw that person or group of people closer to God.

But our reality is that labels continue to be applied to people and to groups of people. That is a truth in society today. We, in general, label people. This leads me to ask you: are you or have you ever defined by one label or by one characteristic? In John 9, the blind man is identified as a "sinner" because of his blindness. "Sinner" had become his very being. But is he a sinner? Is the label you are defined by all that you are? I believe the answer to both questions is obvious. No. No, he was not just a sinner. Nor you are just a teacher or student, just a parent or child, just a truck driver or nurse, just a lawyer or daycare provider. On a personal level we may know this. As a Christian or aspiring follower of Jesus, we may sense this is true as well for all people.

Last week we spent some time with the Samaritan woman at the well. She had plenty of labels, didn't she? Many that we encounter who live on the fringes of society will have lots of labels. Like they were with the woman at the well, the labels can become barriers to relationship. Like was the case with Jesus and the person at the well, the barriers can be worked over or around. Like was the case with the child of God who encountered the Son of Man at the well, one can look past any label or barrier or stereotype or characterization to find the heart of that brother or sister in Christ. The big question for us today and every day is this: can we look past the superficial to connect to the human being inside?

In our gospel passage from John 9, I wonder, once Jesus empowered the blind man to transcend his label, who did he become? I can't help but think he became a messenger of the good news of Jesus Christ. It changed his life forever. What else could he do? Turning the question a bit more personal, we can ask the same question of ourselves. When we undergo an extreme transformation or when we shed old definitions of ourselves, and we claim a new identity in Christ, are we then defined by the power of God at work in us? Like David, do we allow God to transform us into something more beautiful, more loving, more caring, more powerful to build the kingdom here on earth?

That is the power of Jesus Christ that God offers to each and every one of us. My friends, will you allow the Spirit to be at work in you, maturing your soul into the Christian that God created you to be? It is my hope and prayer that your answer, both in word and deed, is "yes". Yes, God, use me. Yes, God, use each of us. Give us eyes to see as you see. Empower us by your Holy Spirit. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) Grow. What labels do you need to not use for others any more? How will this allow your relationship and connection with them to grow?
- 2) Pray. Where is God spurring you to step over a barrier or stereotype? Pray for the Spirit's power to lead you forward in faith.
- 3) Study. Read John 10: 1-21. How does this passage for next week extend or amplify what you heard or felt from today's message?