

**1 Samuel 15:34-16:13**  
**Mark 4: 26-34**  
**June 17, 2012**  
**Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church**

David son of Jesse was not weak, ugly or of limited intelligence. Yet he was a child small in size, especially when compared to his brothers. The culture of the day did not value children. Thus, when the prophet Samuel comes looking for the king who will replace the rejected King Saul, he expects to find the ruler among the older, bigger, stronger sons. After all kingship is all about power. Ruling is about defeating your enemies and enforcing your will on the people and the larger world. A good king is a strong king. A good king establishes order, predictability. Under a good king everyone finds and accepts his or her place in the world as ordained by the king. And, since Israel's king is established by *God*, this order is created and maintained by God. To rebel against one's place in the world is to rebel against the king. And to rebel against the king is to rebel against God. To rebel against God is, well...not a good idea. So a king must be strong to enforce the will of God.

There is something not quite right about this picture. First of all, the establishment of the kingship in Israel is understood in scripture as Israel's *rejection* of God. When Israel demanded a king it was a blatant rejection of God's will that they rely on *him* for their protection and prosperity. When God led them into the land of promise and through them drove out all the peoples who were living there, it was with the clear intention that they have nothing to do with the practices of these people. They were to worship God alone. They were to rely on God to protect them from foreign attack. In short God's entire purpose in selecting Israel for deliverance was so the world would come to know *God* as the one true God.

God chose Israel not because they were so faithful and wonderful and strong. He chose them for precisely the *opposite reason*. It is Israel's stubborn, fearful, self willed and rebellious nature that causes God to choose them. *Why*, so that they can recognize God working in and through them; so they can have the joy of knowing that God is faithful even and *especially* in their *weakness*. It is God's desire that the world will see the wonder and power of God through Israel's faithfulness and dependence upon God *alone*. Through this witness, God intends, all people will submit their will and their lives to the care and direction of God.

I belong to a fellowship that uses these words: "We turned our will and our lives over to the care of God." Then we add the words, "*as we understood him*." Now this is important for people who have been force fed an image of God that has detached them from a living experience of God's *actual*, life giving presence. But this is not the biblical view. In the Bible, the power of the living God comes from turning our will and our lives over to the care of God, *as God understands us*. As the apostle Paul tells the Corinthians, we now see ourselves and others *from God's point of view*. According to God we are wonderful creations. We bear his likeness. Yet we at the same time are lost and afraid. We are much more inclined to take life into our own hands and to turn to worldly things and people to make us safe. Thus we worship the things that give a sense of security. We want *strong* leaders to rule over us and protect us. We look to strong armies on land, sea and air to protect us against our enemies. We shore up our insecurity with hard attitudes and numb our insecurity with behaviors that give us escape in the moment. When people, places and things disappoint us we are outraged.

God could look and see us in all our worldly glory and decide that we are a waste of his time, wipe us off the map and try again. But instead, as God tells Samuel looking at Jesse's tall and strong brothers, the outward appearances do not matter for, "the Lord looks upon the heart." And when the Lord looks upon the heart what does God see? He sees, terribly obscured by sin, fear, anger, pain and despair, the *love* with which he created each human being in particular and humanity in general. He sees you and me. So flawed! So anxious! So worried about ourselves and others! Feeling so helpless to make anything better in ourselves and in the world! He sees our yearning to do the right thing so often defeated by the tangled confusion of our hearts. This elicits from God, not judgment but compassion. God consistently chooses the weak over the strong to give evidence of his presence. God chooses David *because he is a child and seen to be of little value*. He is delighted when David's son, Solomon rejects the trappings of power but, in all humility recognizes his inadequacy to be king and instead asks for God's wisdom.

God's understanding of humanity in general and of you and me in particular is that we are worth any effort, any cost to overcome our fears and flaws. The "we" of *God's* understanding is the source of heart breaking love as a parent yearns for the return of an estranged child; as the father went every day to scan the horizon for his prodigal son. As the apostle Paul writes to the Romans, the proof of God's love for us is "that while we were yet sinners (literally while our lives were utterly helpless to choose God) Christ died for us."

Indeed, if we want to know how great God's love is for us, we have only to look to Jesus. John calls Jesus "the Word" made flesh. But might we not this morning call Jesus God's point of view of us made flesh? Jesus fully expresses the "we" of God's understanding. Jesus through his humble birth, his life, teachings, his unfailing compassion for us, his suffering at

our hands when he wasn't the strong king we demanded and God's raising him from the dead lets us know exactly and absolutely the secret of God's heart for the whole world. In short, if we want to know what God feels for the world and for you and me we have only to look to Jesus.

This, I suggest helps us to approach the parables which he hear from Mark's gospel. When we judge Jesus from our human point of view he seems insignificant just as he seemed insignificant to the people of his time. When we compare what is claimed about him and compare the claims against the hard facts of our lives and the pain and suffering in the world, his words seem at best naïve and at worst subversive.

Yet I propose that when we approach Jesus in this way we are using our human standards to judge. Compared with the mountain of trouble in the world what Jesus offers is so insignificant as to be laughable. Is that way we call our selves one nation *under God* and yet spend trillions of dollars protecting ourselves?

I also propose that when we judge Jesus in this way we are really projecting upon him our own sense of helplessness. We do not recognize that we have within each one of us a tiny insignificant seed that God intends to sprout and nourish into a beautiful flowering shrub. If we stop judging what we are and are not able to do by the standards of our mere humanity and look to Jesus we will find ourselves doing and thinking things that we earlier thought impossible. We will stop looking for people and things to fill the emptiness of our lives. We will find ourselves content and safe in a power far greater than any human power. We will have nothing to risk for we will have nothing to lose.

When that day comes the Kingdom of God will reign. Amen.