

David and the seer (1 Samuel 16:1-13; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41)

It's hard to see the way God sees.

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Seeing is believing.

“Now I see it.”

“It was love at first sight.”

The theme of sight draws together three of this week's lectionary texts. In John 9 the blind man receives his sight. In Ephesians 5 Paul reminds readers that in the light everything becomes visible. And in 1 Samuel 16:1-13 the Hebrew word for “see” occurs six times.

The Lord commissions Samuel the seer to anoint a new king in place of the rejected King Saul. The Lord has provided a king from among the sons of Jesse. Samuel protests this, because there is no vacancy on the throne, and its present occupant will not take kindly to what will be perceived as an act of treason.

The Lord offers Samuel a plausible cover story—he will be in Bethlehem offering a sacrifice. The tension in the story builds as we read that the elders of Bethlehem tremble with fear at Samuel's visit.

When the seer sees Jesse's oldest son Eliab, Samuel assumes that the search is complete. From the Lord's speech in the following verse, it appears that Eliab looks the part of the king in appearance and in height. The reference calls to mind the choice of Saul, who was a head taller than anyone else at his anointing (1 Sam.

10:23).

Tension continues to build as the Lord rejects not only Eliab, but also Abinadab, Shammah, and four more unnamed sons of Jesse. Seven sons—yet not one chosen by the Lord.

The problem is seeing the way the Lord sees. The Lord tells Samuel not to gaze (a different Hebrew verb is used here) on appearance or height. The Lord analyzes the vision problem. Humans see only appearances, but the Lord sees the heart—the metaphorical location in Hebrew of the inner person, one's character, thought processes, memory, and decision-making.

In growing tension, the story reaches a climax as Samuel presses Jesse for more information. Is there anyone else who might be a candidate for this office? The story freezes while the eighth son, the outsider, the one marginalized by birth order and his task as a sheep herder, is summoned.

Shockingly, his facial features and physique are breathtaking. Despite the earlier warning about humans distracted by physical appearance, the narrator, the seer, and the readers cannot take their eyes off this athlete with movie star looks. Does the description portend the future complications of the reign of this great leader, the temptation to grasp for royal power (1 Kings 2:5-9) rather than pursue Torah justice (2:1-4)? The narrator hurries on.

Finally, in the last verse of the passage, the reader learns the name of the new king. When Samuel anoints him, the spirit of the Lord rushes upon *David*.

The story invites its readers to reflect further on vision. As we see in John 9, Jesus defines sin as the failure to see (and believe and follow) the one God sends into the world. Readers are invited to see, to be healed, and to welcome all whom God will send. The Lord sees David though he is marginalized, the last one, the one left out in menial service. God chooses the orphaned, alienated one to become shepherd of God's people.