

“Called to Do the Same” 2015
1 Samuel 16:1, 6-13 Mark 9:30-37

Do you know the names the wealthiest five people in the world?
Can you name anyone who received a Nobel prize last year?
How about the name of the CEO
who ran the most successful business this past year?

But you have no problem remembering the name of who was there
for you when you most needed a friend to listen and care for you.
Or the name of that teacher or coach
who had the greatest influence on your life.

**Sometimes the world’s perception of what is of value and matters,
our sense of a person’s worth can be a little distorted & skewed.**

When I was running a small business,
deciding who to hire was always a difficult task.
Turns out an impressive resume and compelling interview skills
do not always lead to hiring the best and most loyal employee...

... and as I look back, the very best hire over all those years,
was someone who based on her education, resume and experience,
should not have been considered for hire, yet who blossomed
and grew into her job way beyond my wildest expectations.

* **Maybe it’s a sign of God’s grace, creativity and wisdom,
that people can be such wonderfully unpredictable creatures.**

Proceeding this Samuel passage, Saul, the king of Israel
has repeatedly ignored God’s directions and commands,
and so finally the Lord God had rejected him as king.

God told the prophet Samuel that it’s time to anoint the next king,
and sends him to Bethlehem,
where God will tell Samuel which of Jesse’s sons to anoint.
One by one Jesse presents his sons and the prophet is impressed,

but each time God says, no, it's not that one.

After looking at all seven sons that Jesse has presented,
a number that in Scripture generally signifies all or compete,
Samuel is mystified that God hasn't chosen any of them,
so he asks Jesse, are there anymore?
Jesse answers, well there's young David out tending the sheep,
but he's so insignificant and hardly worth the bother for this.

But Samuel tells Jesse to send for him anyway,
and sure enough, David is the one God has chosen.
He's anointed and will become the greatest king of Israel,
as described in Scripture, **a man after God's own heart.**

It was when Samuel was so impressed by Eliab, Jesse's oldest son,
that we're told the point and message of this passage in vs. 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.**"

One of the lessons given throughout the witness of Scripture
is that we are often misguided and distracted by appearances,
and that God frequently
chooses to accomplish through the weak and unlikely.

God is sovereign and will surely accomplish his plan and purpose;
not because of the high quality or skills of the men and women
chosen and called by God to accomplish the task and work,
and not because of their great gifts and abilities,
**- but because God chooses to accomplish extraordinary things,
through the most surprisingly plain and ordinary people.**

As a practical truth, that means
when we are invited or encouraged to volunteer for something,

the question is really **not**
if we are able, competent or skilled enough to serve
but if we are willing to listen and follow,
willing to let God work and accomplish through us...

...for most certainly God will get the job done,
and we're simply being invited to share in God's work and joy.

When we have a difficult or important job or task to be done,
we try to put together
the most capable and competent team of proven winners we can.

We sort through the resumes, call references & conduct interviews.
But God's personnel policies are completely different...

...God frequently chooses to use those most unlikely and unexpected.

After the Apostle Paul
moved on from the church he started in Corinth,
divisions and disputes arose over who was in charge,
which group had the power, influence and mattered most...

... to which Paul wrote a pointed response, 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

For *God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.*

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.

That means that when someone is called to serve by God,
who does not have sufficient strength, skill, time or ability,
yet they successfully accomplish their task and mission,
clearly they have had to rely upon God's instead of their own...
**... God is glorified, because his grace and power have been revealed,
for they had to trust & rely on God and not on human achievement.**

Jesus is teaching a similar lesson in the Mark 9 passage.
He has explained for the second time
that they are on their way to Jerusalem
where he will be betrayed, suffer and die,
and then be raised from the dead in three days.

Along this journey Jesus is focused on preparing his disciples
for after his ascension and they will be leading the Church
to be something different than the culture of this world
by valuing all humanity with a different perspective,
by being a community that welcomes all of God's children.

As we read in *Galatians 3:26-28*

"... for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Jesus is calling the Church to see people in a whole different way.

All through his life and ministry,
Jesus was always attentive to those others rejected or ignored

toward those who seemed insignificant and without status.
**Jesus noticed with compassion those the culture choose not to see...
... and we are called to do the same.**

Consider what Jesus is teaching, vs. 33-35

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he (Jesus) asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.

He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."

**** The way to the top is by serving from the bottom. 2x**

Even though the disciples really didn't get it or understand it,
yet the lesson was important enough that in John 13
he taught that same lesson again at the Last Supper
when he washed the disciples' feet in the Upper Room.

**Jesus knew that after his resurrection
the lessons he'd taught would make more sense to them
and were to help guide and shape the Church of Jesus Christ.**

The disciples had been arguing about, who is the greatest?
Who has the power, authority and status, **and even in the church
we always seem to want to know who gets to make the decisions.**

vs. 5 He (Jesus) sat down, called the twelve, and said to them,
"Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."

**** You get to the top by serving your way from the bottom.**

As Christians this scene and these words are very familiar to us,
but would have been shocking for the disciples to hear
what Jesus explained with a little demonstration... vs. 36-37

Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

In that culture,
children were seen as, unimportant non-contributors,
as socially insignificant, powerless and mostly ignored.
They had no power, no prestige, no status, basically non-persons.

Of course they loved their children, just as much as we do,
but a child's social standing and status
was only marginally above that of a slave.
It was expected that a child went unnoticed, seen but not heard,
and hardly worthy of a great master's notice or attention.

The lesson is not about being humble or having child-like faith
and the point was not about trying to be more like children.

* Rather, it was to follow **the example of Jesus,**
in noticing, in welcoming the child, the insignificant nobody.

The disciples were still thinking
in terms of this world's success, power and status;
so Jesus noticed and held up a small child to illustrate
the paradox of power and status in the Kingdom of God.

It's not the number of servants that you have,
but the service that you give and the nobodies you notice...
... as exemplified by Jesus welcoming that young child.

Jesus was the sort of man, who attracted and welcomed children.
He noticed the child, one whom culturally, others ignored.

** **Jesus saw and valued the ones whom the world did not,**
and we are called to do the same.

Jesus is saying,
when you welcome the nobody, the unknown, the stranger,

you are welcoming me.

And when you welcome me, you are welcoming God.

**So if you want to be first in the Kingdom of God,
then you must first become a welcoming servant of all.**

To most, children were of no consequence -- essentially invisible;
and his point is, **to start noticing and seeing the invisible**
because by seeing and welcoming the invisibly nobodies,
you are really welcoming Jesus ----
and to welcome Jesus, is to welcome the One who sent him.

Like the disciples, our eyes have been trained by this world,
to notice the famous, the powerful and impressive,
to focus and welcome those who can most help us.

But in this text, Jesus is calling us
to see past ourselves beyond our own interests and desires,
to see past our own egos and our thirst to be first,
to be aware of the invisible and devalued ones...
**and not overlook seeing God present and working
in the ordinary and seemingly insignificant.**

The lesson is not strive to try harder and accomplish more work,
but to connect more and be more extravagant in showing God's love...

... for to become the greatest,
we must become one with the seemingly least of these,
**to help the outcast find God's comfort, love and hope
to be present and share in the messiness of life.**

And it's not just doing nice things for those in need,
or giving stuff in sacrifice from our abundance,
but it's inviting them sit at the same table with us,
sharing a conversation, building a relationship
that lays claim to our hope and unity in Christ.

**Indeed, in the kingdom of God, worth and value are not tied
to accomplishment or pedigree or influence over others,
nor to how impressive or wonderful we may think we are.**

To be great ---
is to notice and love outsiders and insignificant nobodies,
to serve and welcome those without power or status,
**to reflect God's grace and hope and joy
to those who probably can't do a thing for you.**

Though we'd choose the more qualified – obviously God does not.
We set limits and boundaries for inclusion – but Jesus does not.

My guess is that once in the kingdom of God,
all of us are going to be a bit shocked and surprised
by who it is that the Lord honors and entrusts with power;
and that the ones Jesus puts first, may well **not be
the impressive firsts of our world and expectations.**

God chooses and loves all, despite the chaos we make of our lives,
freely giving
what we cannot hope to achieve for ourselves by grace.

God calls us to receive His grace and compassion,
which has nothing to do with
our being qualified or worthy of God's favor.

We are valued, precious and treasured,
simply because God has said so, by God's choice alone...
... and we are called to do the same.

And all around us,
the world cries out in hopelessness, loneliness, fear and need.
Jesus has reached out to us with love and acceptance,
and the question is, will we respond and will we do the same?...

... Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.
... Jesus says that is the way it works in the Kingdom of God.