

**“Just a Shepherd”**, a sermon in response to 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13, 2 Corinthians 5:6-17, and Mark 4:26-34, by **Emily (in red)** and Scot McCachren at the First Presbyterian Church of East Hampton, June 17, 2018.  
(Originally formatted to assist oral presentation, including irregular punctuation.)

Last week, as we continued working our way through 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, we talked about Israel’s rejection of God when it demanded a king of its own. But, by setting their sites on the values of *this* world, they turn their backs on God Almighty,... the *one and only reason* they have been successful through the generations. And so, without listening to the voice of God, their first king, Saul, fails. +++ And again in *today’s* Old Testament reading, as Samuel goes to find God’s *new* choice for king - he learns the same lesson again - for *himself* this time - that we must be open to God’s way of thinking – and God’s hand in history’s unfolding, rather than our own, +++  
. **Samuel** – who has been listening to the voice of God since the Lord’s whispers in the night called him long ago – **Samuel**, who is prophet, priest, judge, and leader over Israel – even **Samuel** is seduced by the standards of *this* world – as he thinks:: “Jesse’s son Eliab must be the Lord’s anointed – look how **tall and handsome** he is!” So, the Lord says to Samuel, “Don’t look on his *appearance* or the height of his stature – I’ve already rejected him. – The Lord does not see as mortals see – *they* look on *outward* appearance, **but the Lord looks on the heart!**” +++ And the Lord gives Israel something unexpected - something new – a **true** and **human** king like they wanted – yet **also** a man after God’s own heart – King David. +++ **God** works it out!! +++ And we are left asking ourselves, like Samuel:: – “Why can’t we stop expecting only what we’ve always seen before – what we’ve always known – instead of **expecting** that maybe – just maybe – right now – among us – God is doing something new - and right?”

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The human point of view is full of judgment, falsehoods that we have fed ourselves from the time we understood language. The human point of view gets everyone in trouble – humans and nonhumans alike. Even God suffers when we choose to see only from our perspective. In our Epistle reading, Paul is urging us to recognize that our human bodies, our human lives, may be our temporary home, but they cannot be the most intimate connection to the divine. To be at home with the Lord is, yes, our ultimate comfort - as Paul asserts to the Corinthians. So how do we live in these bodies, perceiving the world in our flawed way, and still follow Christ ever closer?

It is only because God knows who we are. Paul writes, “we ourselves are well known to God,” adding “and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences.” Paul speaks of divine relationship and human connection. We ourselves, and everyone around us, are well known to God. God’s point of view, therefore, cannot be filled with judgment and falsehood like we have become accustomed to. No, our God died for us to know us more fully. When Christ died for us – we all died – wrapped up in the promise that one day we would be made new. And here we are, made new in Christ’s death and resurrection all those years ago. Everything, everyone around us made new. And yet we still perceive the world as humans do.

When Christ lived, God had the human point of view. But when Christ died, all of that, all of us, were transformed. Creation was equipped anew with divine reading glasses as the temple crashed to the ground. To no longer see from a human point of view means to recognize love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control as human realities instead of judgment and falsehood.

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Samuel asks Jesse, “Are ALL your sons here?” And he said, “Well, there remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.”... Jesse’s answer pretty much amounts to saying, “Yes, all of my sons are here – at least all of them you’d be interested in seeing.” +++ Well... If Jesse is trying to anticipate what God wants – he’s got it **doubly** wrong:: First, that the Lord would never be interested in the **youngest son** – and Second, that David can never amount to much because he’s **just a shepherd**. +++ Worldly values – clouding his judgment. +++ Time after time, God has called and blessed a **younger** brother over older siblings:: Abel over Cain, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over 10 elder brothers, and the list goes on... +++ And, “shepherd”... that may be the most potent image of loving, solid, leadership in all of the Hebrew Scriptures. **Abraham** had tended sheep – **Isaac** had so many flocks that the Philistines envied him – and folds under **Jacob’s** care always flourished and grew exponentially. **Moses** was shepherding when the Lord called him from the Burning Bush. AND, “shepherd” is evoked time and again as an image of God – loving and protecting God’s people. +++ To be a

shepherd – is to be courageous – to be kind – to sacrifice yourself – to bring food to your family’s table. +++ **JUST a shepherd??** +++ *As far as mortals like Jesse see*, a shepherd is just a laborer forced to work long hours in the hot sun because it’s all he’s fit to do... But the Lord “looks on the heart.” +++ *Why does Jesse, David’s own father, dismiss him like that?* ... Why do **WE?**... *Why* do we define people according to *our own* terms?? **We** put boxes around people, then judge them according to the box? +++ And not just *other* people – but we do it *to ourselves* – just *positive* that, for some reason known maybe only to yourself, you’re not good enough – ... you’re not the *kind* of person... that Christ is looking for... +++ **“Oh, David?... He’s just a shepherd!... And the youngest... You don’t want him!!”** +++ **“Oh, ME?... I’m much too flawed... You don’t want me!!”** +++ How can we step away from our own understanding... from our own prejudices... our own closed minds... our own self judgment – **and open ourselves to see, and be seen, as God sees??**

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Paul is challenging us to open our minds to see the world in this new, divine way. Who are we? We were created to be in relationship with each other. Through Christ, we have been re-created so that our relationships shine with renewed wonder. Less judgment, less hate. Our very lives depend on it. Families torn apart depend on it. Depend on us to see them as God does. To see them as mothers, fathers, teenagers, children, infants, being ripped apart from the only family they will ever know. Forget everything else anyone calls them from the human point of view, forget the spoon-fed judgments we hold on to for dear life. And see them as God does. See them as God’s beloved children, tortured by someone else’s flaws. Our flaws.

Who are we?

Stop giving credit to the labels you have created or welcomed your whole life long and see that we are all made new. Made and re-made in the image of God, creator and redeemer. Take a deep breath and put aside your earthly spectacles. Do it for families torn apart. For all of God’s beloved children who are bullied, incarcerated, stripped of their rights, or gunned down. Do it for Christ. Who gave his life so you would no longer need to see the world as a human wasteland of forgotten potential. Pick it up – pick up your willingness to see as God does and welcome a new age.

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David embodies a new age for Israel – an age with a king... who follows the Lord. +++ God called that young shepherd – and then gave him the heart, the mind, the wisdom, to pull it off. But those *skills* are not what made David great. David was great because, as small and flawed as he was, he responded to God’s call. +++ And from the moment Samuel anoints him, we read, “the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.” David was a man “after God’s own heart.” I’m not just talking about something that *seemed* to happen – it’s not a matter of *perception*. When David accepted God’s call and the Holy Spirit came upon him, he was **MADE NEW**, ready to change the world. +++ +++ In the Presbyterian church, we believe that we are **each** called to respond to God’s grace through **our own** calling – just like David. Now, we aren’t all called to be a king – we each are called to honor and serve God in our own way. Maybe you are called to teach, maybe to usher, to sing, be an elder or deacon, serve on a committee, or lead the youth group... Maybe you are called to Meals on Wheels, Cuba, or the Food Pantry. Maybe you are called to simply give a smile and kind word to those who get them all too rarely – or to be a kind parent, or a generous boss. Whatever it is – it doesn’t matter if you believe your call is big or small – from the time you accept it – God gives you everything *you* need to **pull it off** – equips you – just like David. +++ I’m not just talking about something that *seems* to happen – it’s not a matter of *perception*. When you accept God’s call in your life, and you live in Christ, you “are a new creation: everything old has passed away,” and you are ready to change the world. +++ In our Call to Worship this morning, we spoke of “God who, with forgiving hands, shapes us into new people.” That’s **grace**, changing us to change the world. +++ **However little you think you have to offer, however small the seed you think you’re planting,... respond to God – the Holy Spirit will lift you up... and give you what you need.**

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We know who we are. Paul speaks of the inevitability of re-creation. Christ died for all life. For every possible king or queen, every shepherd and bird of the air. We are all living with Christ’s grace because we all died in want, in need of it. So, we cannot go on living as if we have not been re-created. Unfortunately, the human point of view will plague our world until Christ comes again in final victory. And yet, the inevitability of God’s coming kingdom is for our benefit too. It was inevitable that we would be re-created, and it is inevitable

yet that we shall grow in the kingdom of God and allow the kingdom to grow through us - like the mustard tree grows, from the smallest, perhaps least expected seed. Three of our gospels record this mustard seed parable, Mark's is only different in Christ's question – with what shall we compare the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God was sown in Bethlehem, where David was anointed and Christ's newborn cries were heard. Where the world was turned upside-down, reflecting God's kingdom, with the savior of the world sown in the most unlikely of places – the smallest seed. But it grew, sprouting new life and new followers along the way. And it still grows. Perhaps some branches are withering, and the gardeners seem to visit less frequently. But it grows nevertheless. And the birds of the air nest in its shade while it is still growing. We nest in the shade as the kingdom is still growing. The kingdom adapts to our presence, grows higher and wider, providing more shade for welcoming everyone made new. I would like to think that from within the shade it is impossible to see from a human point of view, but maybe it just means it is a little easier to consider God's point of view.

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This morning, I call on you – Paul calls on you – to see as God does,... *not* as humanity so often does. Because our lives – humanity as a whole – depends on Christ making all things new , **if** we want to see a future lived in love, joy, peace, faithfulness... The upside-down kingdom of God is ready to flip us upside-down too. +++ +++ **“But I’m just a shepherd?”** +++ **“I can’t...?”** +++ **“I’m only a mustard seed?”** +++ That voice - that human voice that limits you - is not the voice of God. +++ Built into your DNA, the child of God within you is poised and ready to flip and do great things. +++ With David, *return* from the pasture,... *accept* the Lord's anointing,... *extend* the shade of the tree,... and *show* people that we no longer see them as the world does. And we, as Christ's people, welcome everyone to join us behind the microscope, glasses, binoculars of God so that the human point of view becomes indistinguishable from that of God. +++ It is... inevitable.

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The tiniest of seeds grows into the greatest tree because God wills it. Because God's upside-down, unexpected, inevitably growing kingdom breaks our boundaries – turns our daily lives to parables and divine wonder – so that we can invite everyone to join us in God's shade.

The lowly shepherd boy is the right choice for king because God says so. Because God's upside-down, unexpected, inevitably growing kingdom needs lowly shepherds like David, Amos, Jesus, you, and me, to see this world in the same divine light that illuminated Eden. Because powers rise and fall, but our God is forever – with us in the pastures of life.