

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

1 Samuel 15:34 - 16:13

15:34 Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul. ³⁵ Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel.

16:1 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.

Commentary

God chided Samuel for making a snap judgment based on externals, but curiously when David was selected the only favorable characteristic mentioned was his good looks (16:12). The writer's point is still well-taken, however. We humans are often prone to base our choices and decisions on superficial, transitory factors—appearance, size, cost, popularity, immediate return—but God sees beneath the surface to the heart of things—purity of motive, strength of character, quality of devotion, depth of commitment. The implication is that Samuel—and we—should pay more attention to these intangibles as well.

Reflection

What instances can you recall when your judgment was based on superficial factors, only to learn later that the inner reality was more important? How can we avoid making such snap judgments?

2 Corinthians 5:6-17

^{5:6} So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord -- ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰ For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil. ¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. ¹² We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. ¹³ For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. ¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

Commentary

Paul's evangelistic zeal is motivated by his love for God, and his "right mind" by his love for them (v. 13). The possibility of serving Christ rather than self and the promise of eternal life resulting from conversion are based on Christ's death and resurrection. Because of this revolutionary change in the human situation, we no longer see Christ or persons from a one-

dimensional human perspective (v. 16). Rather, the old is being transformed, and a whole new range of possibilities open.

Reflection

In conversion, what changes and what remains the same? How is the new creation both instantaneous and ongoing?

Mark 4:26-34

^{4:26} He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷ and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. ²⁸ The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come." ³⁰ He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." ³³ With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; ³⁴ he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

Commentary

These parables are intended by Mark as descriptions of the way the Christian movement would develop—from its tiny, insignificant origins to a powerful, world-changing phenomenon. These metaphors referring to the reign of God challenged many Christians to think intently about what our role as the people of God will truly be, and begs questions of what God expects of us.

Reflection

God's realm is a divine mystery rather than a product of human achievement. Is it being faithful just to sit and wait for it to come, or are we meant to help prepare for its coming by working for justice and peace? What signs of the realm do you "already" see?

Psalm 20

^{20:1} The LORD answer you in the day of trouble!
The name of the God of Jacob protect you!

² May he send you help from the sanctuary,
and give you support from Zion.

- ³ May he remember all your offerings,
and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices. *Selah*
- ⁴ May he grant you your heart's desire,
and fulfill all your plans.
- ⁵ May we shout for joy over your victory,
and in the name of our God set up our banners.
May the LORD fulfill all your petitions.
- ⁶ Now I know that the LORD will help his anointed;
he will answer him from his holy heaven with mighty victories by his right hand.
- ⁷ Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses,
but our pride is in the name of the LORD our God.
- ⁸ They will collapse and fall,
but we shall rise and stand upright.
- ⁹ Give victory to the king, O LORD;
answer us when we call.

Closing Prayer

Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.