

“See to the Heart”
1 Samuel 15:34-16:13
Father’s Day—June 17, 2012
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Before the Scripture Reading

We continue our journey through the book of 1 Samuel. Last week we studied the lection in which the people of Israel demand from God a king to be set over them. Though the prophet Samuel tells them the damage a king will do to them, they continue to plead. God, through Samuel, acquiesces to their pleas. Saul, a young man from a wealthy family who is physically strong and handsome, is the chosen king. Samuel anoints him for leadership. King Saul, however, quickly disappoints. The people of Israel come to fear him, he is rebuked by Samuel, he doesn’t obey God’s commandments, he makes a rash oath. . . in short, he sins and rejects the word of God. King Saul acts more out of fear than courage and doesn’t succeed in protecting Israel from military attacks. Samuel is full of grief over him. It’s time for a new king. Here now the story of the anointing of the new king God has chosen for Israel.

Reading of 1 Samuel 15: 34-16:13

I. The Ones Not Seen—The Story of Underdogs

Everybody loves an underdog—especially in sports. The pundits and the sports gurus don’t see them, don’t envision any of these underdogs winning. Our own hearts lift as we see someone who plays with all heart, when we encounter someone who rises above the odds, who overcomes incredible challenge—and comes out as a winner. Sports contests give us the most obvious examples of underdogs—of teams not favored to win but with courage and determination and heart do just that.

Here's a short list of some of the greatest underdogs in sports—I'll go through mine and then at the end you can offer your own underdogs. In 1935, boxer James Braddock defeated Max Baer against incredible odds, and became known as the Cinderella Man. In 1966 Texas Western captured the NCAA Tournament. What makes this victory even more triumphant is that coach Don Haskins started an all African-American line up for the first time ever—an action unheard of at the time. The team battled racism while defeating the all-powerful Kentucky Wildcats. In 1969 the New York Mets won the World Series over the heavily favored Baltimore Orioles; they had never finished higher than ninth place. In 1980 the US Olympic Hockey Team defeated the indomitable Soviet Union and became known as the "Miracle on Ice." The son of a drug-addicted mother and an imprisoned father, Michael Oher had never known a home until he was adopted by the Tuohy family. He became an all-star NFL football player, rising up from above his damaging childhood. In 2001 Goran Ivanisevic won the Wimbledon as a wildcard; he was the first person to ever do so. In 2010 and 2011 the Butler Bulldogs, a mid-major team, made the NCAA tournament becoming the ultimate Cinderella team (even though I studied nine years at Duke, I couldn't help cheering on Butler's heart as they played against the Blue Devils). In 2012 an unknown Asian-American young man was put in to play from the bench when the starters suffered many injuries. He had fought rejection and prejudice his whole life—he was looked over by big-name colleges and went to play for the Harvard Crimson. He went undrafted, and then was dropped by several teams before being picked up by the New York Knicks. When he was finally put into play, Jeremy Lin took his shots, made them, and landed in the hearts and minds of millions of Americans. What underdogs do you remember? (give time for response) We remember these stories, these names because they give us hope. We rejoice in seeing the heart these players exhibit—their courage under fire. They show us that we too

can triumph over our challenges. Underdogs show us that even if no one sees us, we too can come out a winner in the game of life.

II. One Not Able to See—The Prophet without Vision

In our story from 1 Samuel today, one who was supposed to see the next king—the prophet Samuel—is not able to see the underdog put before him. He has trouble seeing that a tiny young shepherd boy from a completely unimpressive ancestry could possibly be king. Even though Samuel says earlier in chapter nine that he is a seer—one who can see with divine vision—he’s not able to see the possibility in David.

In fact, this whole text today turns on the word “to see”—*rayah*. In the beginning of the book of 1 Samuel, the old prophet Eli’s vision had grown dim; he could no longer see physically or spiritually. His young protégé, Samuel, is called by God—awoken in the middle of the night—and Samuel’s vision must now take over as prophet over Israel. Later, in his work as a prophet, Samuel sees the boy Saul, who was “a handsome young man. . . he stood head and shoulders above everyone else.” (1 Samuel 9: 2) Samuel sees the obvious champion, and anoints him. What a disappointment that king turned out to be. Now that God calls him to see the next king, Samuel still looks with eyes like a sports commentator. The eldest son of Jesse, Eliab, is strong and handsome—an obvious choice as a military leader for the people of Israel. God chides Samuel, telling him that he is not seeing (*rayah*) rightly. Samuel is only looking at the obvious, sizing up potential based upon a person’s physical strength whether or not he is to be the top dog. God tells him he needs to see not as humans see, to not look at outward appearances. God tells Samuel he needs to see (*rayah*) with divine vision. God sees (*rayah*) the heart.

III. One Able to See the Heart—God’s Vision

God sees the heart of an underdog. God sees something different in the young

shepherd boy---something that mortals couldn't see. Mortals like Samuel see David's completely undistinguished pedigree: his great grandmother Ruth was a Moabite immigrant, his ancestors include a Canannite woman almost executed for adultery (Tamar) and a prostitute (Tamar) from Jerico. Who would want a king from that kind of line-up? Mortals see an unlikely prospect for success in David—one whom the odds are strongly stacked against.¹

But God? God sees someone who will rise above the odds, someone who will overcome incredible challenges. . . and come out a winner. This God of Israel habitually picks the unexpected, raises up the downtrodden. God, after all, picked Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Gideon over his older brothers. . . and this is the same God who will pick a lowly stable as the birthing place for the Savior. God chooses the outcast, the youngest, the outsider, the nobody. This God's power is made manifest in weakness. God chooses what is low and despised in the world (1 Cor 1: 28) God sees possibilities where others do not. God sees that someone can come off of the bench and make a shot. . . and make a difference. God sees that David is going to courageously play with his whole heart.

Even more, God sees beyond just David as a person to the good of the people of Israel. God's sight, like any good coach of an underdog, is on the welfare of the whole team. In David, all of Israel can hope to rise from their marginalization by their warring neighbors. In this unimpressive shepherd boy lies liberation for Israel. God can see (*rayah*) that. So God says to Samuel (who still isn't quite able to see David's potential), " Arise and anoint him; for this is the one."

IV. One Able to See Our Hearts

God sees our hearts, too. God sees someone who will rise above the odds, someone

¹ Walter Brueggeman, *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination and Memory* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 19-23.

who has and will overcome incredible challenges. . . and who will come out a winner.

Perhaps there is something in your life that has you feeling like an underdog. Perhaps your opponent is a challenging relationship, or a disease you or a loved one is confronting. Trust that the God of Israel sees possibilities in you that others may not. God's power is made manifest in whatever weakness you may now be experiencing. God sees (*rayah*) the possibilities in you. God sees the courage in your heart—even if you don't see it yourself.

Remember too, though, that just as most underdogs play in teams, and just as God is concerned in this passage as much with Team Israel as with the individual David, so too is God concerned with Team Church more than just our individual stories. Among churches, our little rural, small-town church is the underdog. We are not the glamorous mega-church with 1000+ members. We are not endowed with a sparkling facility with all the latest technology. We aren't one of the big, influential front-range churches in the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference. We're just a little scrappy underdog church hidden behind the Main Street in a funky little mountain town.

But God sees (*rayah*) us. God sees in us a church that can rise above the odds of small rural Methodist churches around the country that are being closed. God sees in us a people who has and will continue to overcome challenges. God sees in us possibilities that others do not. God picks us to go and do service, to be the people of God. God sees that we can come off of the pew and play with all our heart. May it be so. Amen