

“God’s Eyesight”  
Baptism of Everlee Rose Beers  
I Samuel 16:1-12  
December 1, 2019

The cast of characters in this morning’s scripture lesson is considerable. We have one of the greatest prophets of Israel, Samuel, who was opposed to Israel having a king. And in this passage it is Samuel’s job to identify who the next king of Israel is to be. Samuel is incredulous, but he has a job to do, which takes him to the home of Jesse, Jesse being the father of over half a dozen boys. One of them will be king!

Samuel assumes that God will choose the eldest son of this family: Eliab. But following divine instruction, Samuel skips over Eliab and moves on to the next son, and the next, and the next. Surely Jesse’s oldest son cannot miss the reality of the situation: Eliab has been rejected. Eventually David, the youngest, is chosen - much to just about everyone’s consternation, even his father’s.

We could read this story through Samuel’s eyes and perhaps catch the frustration and confusion: at great personal risk, the prophet does God’s bidding, apparently without any sense of the drama that is unfolding before him. Samuel, in effect, is being asked to see something in David that he simply cannot see, and which even David’s father cannot see, nor David’s eldest brother. We could even speculate how the present king, Saul, might have been struck by this turn of events - if and when he hears about it.

But this is not a story about Eliab, or Samuel, or Jesse, or Saul - or even David, even though, on the surface, this appears to be the story of how the second king of Israel was recognized. But this is God’s story: the story of a God who sees in men and women what they cannot see in one another. It is the story of a God who works through us in ways that we can scarcely fathom ourselves. It is the story of a God who is able to see beyond height and beauty and intellect in order to see what comes out of the heart, and then is able to do something with the strengths - and the weaknesses - that only God can discern.

Ministers, at least if they are paying some modicum of attention to their calling and work, are able to discover this again and again. They are reminded of this truth about God's story - almost every week - when someone tells about how some sermon spoke to a need in their life, how some hospital prayer helped them through a frightening surgery, or how some visit saw them through a difficult time. Ministers carry within their souls this knowledge that there was a divine word contained in their human words, and a divine presence conveyed through their human presence.

You might remember Father Mulcahey from reruns of the old television show M\*A\*S\*H. In one episode, he has a crisis of vocation and confesses to Hawkeye that he was not sure that his priestly work really mattered. Comparing himself to the surgeons of their unit, Father Mulcahey said that while doctors were saving countless lives, as a priest he was accomplishing nothing concrete. Hawkeye responded:

“A professor I had in medical school once told me that God heals the patient, but the doctor collects the fee,” to which the priest said, “Do you believe that?” Hawkeye considered a moment, and then reflected: “I don't know.” And then he went on to say, “But I do know that I have done some things in the operating room that I am not good enough to do.”

I have remembered this scene over the years because it has always spoken to me about the truth of God's story. It is God's story breaking into all of our stories - ministers and laypersons alike - who in some glorious moment of calling have been able to say a word that we were not wise enough to say, stand sometime when we were not strong enough to rise, and give something of ourselves that we never knew we had.

And because we have known in our heart of hearts that this ministry came not from our own resources, but rather came from God, we have been pressed to see God's story acted out in other people's lives, as well as in our own, sometimes inexplicably.

That helps to explain the baptism we were privileged to witness here this morning. The water which was poured upon a child here is a common element - a simple,

unassuming part of the created order. But it takes divine eyesight to see in this most common of elements the evidence that God cares for us all - not only for this child, not only for her family, but for all of us. And that is because the water, like the child herself, is God's as well. And God can act through creation to bring us grace, courage, solace, and love - in short, God can be present here and now, perhaps not where the world might expect, but in the everyday moments of everyday lives of everyday things. For the baptism of Everlee Rose is not so much her story, or even her mother and father's story, and not even our story, but God's story.

So too is God's presence in the act of Communion at the table where we will shortly be sharing. In our kitchens we prepared the bread, and our hands fashioned juice from the grape. But this table does not exist because some minister, or deacon, or denomination willed it or consecrated it. This table, built with human hands, is God's table. And the act of sharing which we will participate in is part of God's story, made known to us in Jesus Christ, as we once again find ourselves at the beginning of another Advent season. If any story is God's story, surely it is in the season of Advent, during which we have been taught to see in the ox and the ass which bow before the Child in a manger a singular truth: that all the creation bears witness to the love of our heavenly Father. So where the world might see simple shepherds and a charming tale of Gabriel and the angels along with three kings, God's eyesight reveals so much more. Let us be prepared to discern God's presence here in this place, whether it be in the sacraments, in God's Word, or in the faces of one another.

Let us pray: