

“God Sees from a Different Point of View”

1 Samuel 15:14-16:13; 2 Corinthians 5:6-17

I spent the first half of the week before last visiting my sister Joan and her companion Dan of nearly 30 years in Wooster, Ohio. Dan was in hospice and in the end stage of lung cancer. He passed a week ago.

While visiting, Dan’s 40 year old daughter engaged me in a conversation about church membership and politics while we kept vigil. She had been attending a large megachurch in Wooster named “Grace Church”. She told me her story that she quit going to Grace because the pastor preached about who she should vote for. There is no grace at “Grace” apparently!

This leads me to talk with you about *discernment*. Discernment is one of the reasons why serious Christians read and study the Bible. It is to be able to reason and act on their own. It is not to predict the future. It is not to get insider information on how to be successful and happy. It is not even to develop a personal “to do list” about what to do or not to do to live a holy life. It is to follow Christ. It is to discern in the words of John Wesley how, “to do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.”

The lesson here is that your church, any church or your pastor, any pastor does not do discernment for you. If they did attempt to do such as the Grace Church in Wooster did, RUN FOR YOUR LIFE!

The Old Testament, the first testament, the Hebrew Scripture was written to reveal wisdom to human beings. ***Spiritual Discernment*** is applying wisdom gleaned from studying religious tradition, receiving counsel from trusted persons of character, listening to God with perseverance, and finally acting upon this guidance with courage. All of these elements working together in our lives construct a process of *spiritual discernment* for us.

One of these sources of spiritual discernment comes from an old religious tradition called the Enneagram. For those of you who are not familiar with the Enneagram, simply put it is one way of understanding our human psyches.

The word “ennea” is a Greek word meaning “nine”. The word “gram” derives from the Greek word “grámma” and indicates “that which is written” or “that which is drawn” and it appears in words such as “diagram” and “anagram”. So the word Enneagram implies a “picture of nine”. The “nine” refers to nine personality styles and their related behavioral patterns. It’s worth bearing in mind that none of the nine styles is better or worse than any other. All can function exceptionally well and positively when they are operating at their best. Equally, all can be damaging and destructive when operating at their worst.

It is based upon ancient religious wisdom tradition. It is a Christian resource based the the seven deadly sins/cardinal virtues from the New Testament in the Book of Galatians. It is also shared with the other monotheistic wisdom traditions plus two more—deceit/truthfulness and fear/courage.

The more we become aware of our strengths and weaknesses the more we are able to live fulfilling and meaningful lives. The more understand how we are formed and our personality style is with its strengths and weaknesses, the better we are at discerning God’s direction for us.

In today’s Scripture passages that I read from Samuel there is crucial moment of spiritual discernment that is presented. The anointing of David is now presented as an exercise in right “seeing” or spiritual discernment. Twice in this chapter the Hebrew verb ra)â is used with the specialized meaning of “provide”—seeing in the sense of discerning or choosing. In v. 1, God says, “I have provided [seen] for myself a king,” and in v. 17, Saul says, “Provide [see] for me someone who can play.” God sees more than Saul can see in David. In the anointing episode, God sees more than Samuel. In vv. 6-7, Samuel (the seer! 9:19) sees only outward appearance, but God sees the heart.

The story has now gone full circle. At the beginning of Samuel’s story it was Eli who could not see, visions were rare, and the lamp of God was dim (3:1-2). Now it is Samuel who does not see clearly, and God must directly indicate the proper choice. At the center of this episode is a drama of right seeing. In it, the author underlines the theme of appearance and reality, which is central to this text.

The reality of God's future for Israel does not always appear clear to human eyes, even to those of a prophet. The lesson here for us is that only God sees rightly 100% of the time.

In his book *Blink*, Malcom Gladwell shares the story of President Warren G. Harding as an example of a thinking error. He calls it the "Warren Harding Effect."

Warren G. Harding, the twenty-ninth president of the United States is always at the bottom of the most effective president's lists. Some historians put him in last place. His policies were questionable, his speeches uninspiring and he managed to appoint a slew of corrupt officials prompting the Teapot Dome bribery scandal. Did I mention his marital infidelity?

Now despite this, Harding was a likable guy. He had a deep voice and significant personal charm. As a young man he was quite handsome and as an elder, looked to be a distinguished statesman. People who met him instantly liked him. For some reason they thought that would make him a good senator. Despite his dismal record in the Senate, they thought he would make a good president.

Malcolm Gladwell says that when we are attracted to someone we easily make the mistake that they may have other talents. We mistake charisma for capabilities. We assume that if they're likable they're capable. We shouldn't pick an accountant because they're likable. We shouldn't choose someone to live with because they have charisma. Sometimes we will find a more complete truth with our outer eyes shut and our powers of discernment brought to bear. This is what the Prophet Samuel struggles with.

As Samuel examined each of Jesse's sons, he looked for the qualities that the world often values, such as strength, stature, and outward appearance. However, in a moment that would change the course of history, the Lord revealed to Samuel that He does not look at the outward appearance but at the heart. It was David, the youngest and least expected of Jesse's sons, who possessed a heart after God's own heart. His humility, faith, and courage made him the chosen vessel for king.

How often is this the case for us? How often in our rush to judgment do we assess a person wrongly? How often do we assess ourselves wrongly?

How often do we fail to examine our own motivations before acting? How often do we react in anger or in fear?

God sees from a different point of view. God does not look at the outward appearance but looks at the heart and character. **The lesson here is that we will find a more complete truth with our outer eyes shut and our powers of discernment brought to bear.**

When Samuel first hears God's summons to anoint a new king he responds in fear: "If Saul hears of it, he will kill me". To anoint a new king while Saul still physically occupies the throne would be treason. God tells Samuel to take a heifer along so that he can claim to be journeying to Bethlehem for a sacrifice, but once there the purpose is clear. Samuel is to invite Jesse and his sons to the sacrifice and anoint the one God names. God almost seems indulgent with Samuel in saying, "I will tell you what to do."

There is one final lesson here for us. So often we want to know the endgame. We want to know the entire plan when we are discerning an important action or decision. God does not work this way. **God says, "Be patient and keep listening. I will tell you what to do."**

As we reflect on this story, we can draw parallels to our own lives. We may at times feel insignificant or ill-equipped for the roles that God has in store for us. However, the story of David's anointing serves as a powerful reminder that with God, all things are possible. He sees the potential within us, even when the world does not. It's a reassurance that our worth is not determined by worldly standards, but by the sincerity of our hearts and our willingness to follow God's call. Let us carry this message with us as we go forth from here today. Let us remember that our worth and potential are not defined by outward appearances, but by the condition of our hearts and our faith in the Almighty. Just as David was anointed as king in the most unexpected of circumstances, may we have the courage to embrace God's plans for us, even when they seem unlikely. Let us go forth with faith, knowing that God calls us to be responsible in spiritual discernment, to be patient and keep listening, and to act in faith and courage to follow God's call to us.

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