

Today we are starting a new series. One that will take us through to advent, that time just before Christmas. As Christmas is not too far away, the series will be fairly short.

It will be a series of stories, stories about the person who we know most about in the entire Old Testament. Stories about David. He was a poet, a warrior who became king. We have stories of him in his finest hours and stories of him at his absolute worst. There are times when we can see him as a person who sought after and relied on God and we can go wow that is great it is wonderful. And then there are times and other stories about David that make me recoil in horror. From time to time David stuffed things up completely. Through these stories we will see David being a human, we will see his interactions with God, the experiences he had and the confrontations as well. Now there are lots of stories to choose from, and I will not cover all of them. That would take over 6 months to do. Instead I am selecting a few of them from different times in David's life. As they are stories I will be telling them as stories, but stories based on and built on the stories recorded in the Bible.

Today the story comes from 1 Samuel chapter 16.

I will pray.

Prayer

It was a hot summers day in Israel, and Samuel the prophet was making his way through the countryside, along the dusty roads to Bethlehem. As he walked along the road he had a heifer by his side, a young cow that he was taking with him. Now that was unusual, a prophet with a cow walking along the road.

He was going the long way to Bethlehem, through the mountain country. Jews had to do that in those times. staying clear of Jerusalem, that was Jebusite, enemy territory even though it was only a few kilometres away from his destination of Bethlehem.

As he walked, Samuel thought about the last years and what had happened. Saul was the ruler, of Israel and had been for some time, but it had not been a smooth leadership, there had been some real problems. There had been battles with enemies on every side of the kingdom, battles against Moab, against Edom, against the Philistines, against the Amalekites. And yes Saul and his army had won those battles, but in the process Saul had shown that he was not a good ruler at all. He had disobeyed God's instructions, and when Samuel had confronted him about it - well Saul had been full of excuses, showing no signs at all of being sorry for what he had done. That was no way for the king of Israel to behave, it had not been a smooth time at all.

And Samuel had grieved, grieved over Saul and the lost opportunities, he had spent days, nights, weeks upset and feeling down. But now, now there was a glimmer of hope.

Now, Samuel was walking on a dusty road with a heifer beside him to Bethlehem on a mission from God.

What had God told him?

"How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your flask with anointing oil and get going; I will send you to Jesse of Bethlehem, I have spotted the king I want among his sons." There was hope, there was a way forward, God had found the person he wanted as king. But what would Saul do if he found out?

And so Samuel had protested to God that Saul would kill him if he knew what was going on, so God had said "Take a heifer with you and announce, 'I've come to lead you in worship of God, with this heifer as a sacrifice.' Make sure Jesse gets invited. I'll let you know what to do next. I'll point out the one you are to anoint." So as Samuel walked along the dusty road, with the heifer by his side he started wondering about the new king of Israel, the one that God had chosen.

Well it was a bit strange going to Bethlehem for a start. That didn't sound like the sort of place that a king would come from. That was a small rural town, looking for a king there would be like looking for one in Taihape, rather than Havelock North or Wellington. But that was where Samuel was going, that was what God had told him to do.

And Jesse? Well Samuel had heard a few rumours about his family tree. His grandmother had been a Moabite, one of those people that would pollute any family tree. Someone that they were forbidden to marry and if they did, any children were banned from the tabernacle, from connecting with God for at least 10 generations. That is what the law said. And any children of Jesse would only be three generations from a Moabite - and three is a lot less than 10. That seemed really strange. But it was to Jesse and his family that Samuel was going, that was where God had told him to go.

So the place seemed to be wrong, the family tree seemed to be wrong, but God is God, and God had told him that his chosen king was there. He must be really impressive, a tall strong warrior that is what Israel needs. But Samuel knew that he needed to trust God, God had said that he would let him know what to do and who to anoint.

And then Samuel, heifer by his side, came to Bethlehem. Now that was such a strange sight that the elders of the town came to meet him, and trembling with fear they asked Samuel if anything was wrong, and he replied -

Nothing's wrong. I've come to sacrifice this heifer and lead you in the worship of God. Prepare yourselves, be consecrated, and join me in worship." and Samuel made sure Jesse and his sons were also there.

So the people started arriving the sacrifice started.

Jesse and his sons came as well, the new king would be among them. Samuel took one look at the eldest, Elib, he was tall and mature, a real warrior, the eldest son, a leader and Samuel thought "surely this is the future king, God's anointed". Isn't it always the eldest son who becomes king?

But GOD told Samuel, "Looks aren't everything. Don't be impressed with his looks and stature. I've already eliminated him. GOD judges people differently to what humans do. Men and women look at the face; GOD looks into the heart."

So Elib wasn't the one.

Samuel waited for the next son, Abinadab, and he thought, well maybe there was something wrong that I didn't know about with the eldest, but this son, Abinidab, well surely it will be him. But God had not chosen him either.

The third son, Shammah, came by and it wasn't him as well. So one by one, son after son came up to Samuel, and God had not chosen any of them.

Seven sons, all of them who were there, had come up and none of them were chosen.

And Samuel said to Jesse, look are all your sons here. Is this it?

And Jesse said, well there is one more, the youngest. But he is not important, he is the runt, the smallest of the lot. We have sent him out to look after the sheep.

And Samuel said, go get him, I am staying here until he comes.

So one of the other brothers scurried off to get the youngest son, from away in the hillside, so it was a couple of hours before he arrived. He was only young, a teenager, still growing, but he was the very picture of health—bright-eyed and good-looking.

And God said to Samuel “Up on your feet! Anoint him! This is the one.”

So Samuel took his flask of oil and anointed him, with his brothers standing around watching. The Spirit of God entered that son, David like a rush of wind, God vitally empowering him for the rest of his life. David was going to become king.

And then Samuel left and headed back home.

Now when Samuel left, David did not go with him. David stayed behind.

And what is more David's life didn't suddenly change. He was still the youngest son. He had 7 older brothers who still bossed him around. He still looked after the sheep. There was no growing up in a palace, or being waited on hand and foot.

Saul was still alive so David could not become king yet.

But from the stories that come after this, we do know that some things did change for David.

There will some skills he gained and experiences he had. He played the lyre, a type of harp. And he learned to play it so skilfully that when people heard him they said wow.

David became known as a warrior, someone who knew when to speak, and when to be silent, he had a real sense of mana, and people could see that the LORD was with him.

We also know that David learned to be brave, and he learnt it the tough way. He had to defend his flock of sheep from bears and lions. Yes David was called by God, yes David was chosen by God and filled with the Holy Spirit. But God was giving him experiences, training as well. And for David at this stage of his life, that meant singing songs, but it also meant fighting lions and bears on his own.

And this story teaches us that.

But most of all this story shows how God chooses the ordinary, the everyday, the people who are overlooked to bring hope, to bring change, to become kings and queens.

David came from a small rural town, he had a family tree that should have excluded him. He was the youngest of eight sons. That does not sound like someone who is royal material.

When Kate Middleton was about to marry William, people poked around her family tree. While she was already moving in those royal circles, people also found out that she had some maternal ancestors, a branch of the family that had been working-class labourers and miners. In some royalist eyes that was almost enough to think that William was making a mistake.

But with David, it wasn't marrying into the royal family, it was becoming an entirely new dynasty. The house of David.

Coming from a small rural town, the youngest of eight sons, a family tree that had question marks on it. That was definitely the unexpected, the ordinary, the everyday the one who was overlooked. And that is precisely who God used to bring hope, to bring change.

Us: David

So what about us? What does the story say to us today?

When we become a follower of Jesus, a Christian, the Bible describes us as being chosen by God.

Eph 1:4... talks about God choosing us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

The Holy Spirit enters our hearts when we believe.

We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people. That is from 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 9.

We might feel like we are ordinary, we might not have been brought up in a palace, we might be one of the youngest in our family, the person who was always overlooked. Our family tree might have a few skeletons in it, relatives that we would rather not be there.

We might feel ordinary.

But God chooses the ordinary, the everyday, the people who are overlooked to bring hope, to bring change.

God chooses us, God has chosen us. Just like God chose David.

Now just like happened with David, that does not mean our life will suddenly change. The youngest son remained the youngest son. David still looked after the sheep, we might still have boring thankless things to do.

But just like happened with David, some things do change. God does prepare us for what is in store, God does train us.

Someone here might become a skilled musician, a poet an author. If that is what God is calling you to do, God will help you. You still need to practice, you still need to study, but God will be there with you. Or it might be something completely different that God is calling you to do. But with everything, God is there, helping, guiding as we practice and study.

And for all of us, no matter where we are on our journey, there is a sense that people will see that the Lord is with us, there will be that sense of mana that we gain over time.

Now, just like David, we might have a few bears and lions that attack us in our work. Not physical ones, like you see in the zoo, but problems that seem too much for us, that are not fair. Sometimes those experiences are the ones that God uses to help train us, to develop our strengths.

But no matter what we experience, we can have confidence in God.

God who has called us, God who has chosen us.

We are a chosen race, we are a royal priesthood, we are a holy nation, We are people belonging to God.

Amen.