

Fourth Sunday in Lent ~ March 26, 2017
Sermon preached by the Rev. Daniel Vélez-Rivera
Readings: 1 Samuel 16:1-13, Psalm 23, Ephesians 5:8-14, John 9:1-41

Prayer:

Bend your ear to our prayers, Lord Christ, and come among us. By your gracious life and death for us bring light into the darkness and anoint us with your Spirit. Amen.

Throughout our faith journeys we learn that God is a mystery, and so God, in God's wisdom, turns conventional understanding on its head. The stories from 1 Samuel and from John's gospel are examples of God's unconventional manifestations in the human realm that we know and are part of and the ways in which God manifestations are played out through humanity, God's messengers. We heard in the Old Testament story how the prophet Samuel was led by God's instructions to choose a shepherd boy, David, as the second king of Israel and Judah. So contrary was Samuel's choice from a socio-cultural perspective, that David's dad Jesse had no intention of even introducing David to the prophet Samuel, who Jesse knew would be seeking the next king of Israel from one of his sons. The conventional norm in that patrilineal society was for the eldest son to be the chosen heir, and if for any reason not he, then one of the next sons in line would be selected. But here God's mystery transcended the norm (yet again), and the youngest son of Jesse was anointed by Samuel and consecrated in the name of God to become king and leader of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

David became a great warrior, a poet, and a musician to whom many of the biblical psalms are attributed. He had his flaws, and his flaws also affirm the unconventional and mystical way in which God operates, but regardless of his flaws he was anointed by Samuel and sanctified by God to represent God's people. He was, for the most part, a righteous and effective king who provided civil and criminal justice in the forty years of his reign, approximately between the years 1010 and 970 BCE. Furthermore, David is regarded as an important figure by the three major Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; the affirmation of David by the three religious traditions are further proof of God's unconventional wisdom.

Now let's turn to the gospel story of John where the mystery of God and the anointing of another person among the least expected took place. A blind man was given sight by Jesus consecrated not with oil but with mud. A miracle, and a most unconventional way of teaching the people that the first shall be last and the last shall be first in God's way of doing things. An interesting symbolism in the gospel story is how Jesus used mud to give clarity and enlightenment to the world – the contrast goes beyond symbolism or metaphor. By receiving sight, the story of the blind man gave insight to the religious leaders and neighbors who knew this man as a blind local beggar. We are reminded again and again of God's mystery and how the least become the first.

Today's selection from the gospel and from the first book of Samuel refer to anointing. What does it mean to be anointed? There are many reasons to be anointed. In ancient times and still today, oil was used on the heads of leaders as a symbol of blessing. David was anointed when Samuel discovered the shepherd boy and made him king in the name of God. Today, British monarchs are anointed with consecrated oil and sealed by the Holy Spirit as a blessing of their leadership. Then, to shake things up and reaffirm the counter-cultural nature of God, Jesus used oil, as our healing ministers do here at St. Gabriel's, as part of a Christian tradition of healing in the name of the Holy Trinity. This Christian practice reminds us that God consecrates and heals the least as well as the mighty by the power of the Holy Spirit, another revelation of the mystery of God operating in the world.

The anointing and sanctification of David and the blind man brought a spiritual awakening to them and to those around them. With anointing comes sanctification, and with sanctification comes clarity; a vision of what God wants creation to witness, instead of having a blind eye to the reality of this broken world. Scripture reminds us that while we may judge a book by its cover, the Lord our God doesn't, God looks deeply into our hearts. In Christianity, the word Christ is both a name and a title, and it means "the anointed one", a title for our Savior and redeemer who brings eternal salvation to humankind. Christians are anointed by Christ so that we may live new and transformed lives in Him. When David was anointed by Samuel in God's name, God didn't see a ruddy, bright eyed, bushy tailed young man full of potential, but an open-hearted and open-spirited boy with the spiritual fire of God in his soul. We know then what it means to be anointed and I invite you to reflect on your anointing, on your sanctification. Why are you anointed by God, chosen as a representative of Jesus Christ in this world?

From a congregational perspective I would humbly say, that we are anointed because we have accepted the gift to be an authentically inclusive faith community. A church where all of God's children are genuinely integrated and accepted as God made us and where all people are reconciled to the love of Christ – no exceptions. We must not rest on those laurels though because that it is just the beginning of our mission as people of the light of Christ. Our collective spiritual identity makes us the more accountable to live like Jesus wants us to live and accountable to God and to each other.

Remember that the mystery of God cannot be figured out, that's why it is called a mystery, but in God's wisdom our hearts continue to be opened and our spirits to be stirred. Rejoice in the mystery of God that is in you, for you are blessed! May the light of Christ shine brightly through you. Amen.