

Chosen

1 Samuel 16:1, 4-13
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First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson

A conductor of one of the nation's great symphonies was asked to name the instrument he thought was the most difficult to play. After thinking over the question, he replied: "Second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists. But to find one who can play second fiddle with enthusiasm is often a problem. And if we have no second fiddles, there is no harmony."

When it comes to church life, we are all called to play second fiddle. Christ plays the melody and we provide the harmony and rhythm. Ours is a supportive role in the work of Lord, the Lord's symphony of life. Everyone has role in the symphony of life, everyone is called to play his or her part. To help us discover that role, discover the part we are called to play, we turn to today's Old Testament lesson about the shepherd boy David and his future role as the king of Israel.

The Prophet Samuel is sent by God to anoint the next king of Israel. The problem is Samuel is not sure who God has chosen for that role. To figure that out, he has to set aside his preconceptions about who fits where. Who is suitable to perform which role. And that's not easy for Samuel. It's not easy for us to set aside what we think works and trust in God to show us new ways to do the work of the Lord, maybe even ways of serving that we've never considered or just hastily dismissed.

Samuel sees himself as a pretty perspective guy. So when he looks at the sons of Jesses, he's pretty sure who God is pointing him to as the next king, that being of course, the No. 1 son Eliab. Samuel looks upon Eliab and thinks to himself, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." But God says to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Samuel has to set aside his preconceptions of things and look upon the heart in discerning God's will. And that takes prayerful consideration. Samuel has to be open to what God is showing him, where God is leading him through this process of discernment.

Here at First Church, we are beginning a similar process of discernment. As I mentioned in today's announcements, the Nominating Committee is accepting names of people who you feel might be called to serve as Elders, Deacons and Trustees, maybe even yourself. The problem is we're never exactly sure who God is calling to serve. The best we can do is put forth the names of those we believe might be good in one role or another. And then it's up to that person to search their heart in the presence of God.

We all need to search our hearts in the presence of God when it comes to how we can best serve the church, serve God. When it comes to church service, there are countless things you could do to be of help and support. Just check out the Stewardship Brochure when it hits your mailbox this week or early next. It's got a great list of things people do around here, and some great picture, also. I think you'll really enjoy this year's brochure. So when your Stewardship Brochure arrives, yes, fill out the pledge card and send it in. That's important. But equally important are all the other ways we participate in the life of the church – things like teaching children's and adult Sunday School classes; serving on a committee or board; being a Sunday greeter, usher, liturgist, choir member or sound-and-video volunteer; participating in Wednesday Night Live, mission and community outreach, the Presbyterian Women's circle, the Facilities Workday crew, or any of our other opportunities to serve. And just as important, we are all called to reach out to our fellow church members in prayer, during worship and fellowship events, and through notes and phone calls. I know each and every person at First Church serves in at least one of these important ways. And thanks be to God for all you do.

I also know that each and every person at First Church is called to stretch themselves a bit when it comes to serving God. And that's not easy. It's not easy to think about taking on a new role here at church. But that is one important way that God develops us into the people we can become. It's how God builds us up. And it's how he builds up his kingdom. It's how God blesses this world we live in, a world desperate for godly people willing to serve the Lord.

If this world is going to become all that it can be, we're going to have to do our part. Same for our nation, our communities, our workplaces, schools and families, and yes, our church. You may be like David, quietly serving in an important-yet-modest role. Or you might be like King Saul, ruler of all that's around you, a real mover and shaker who gets the truly important things done. The interesting thing we see with David and King Saul is that God takes the lowly shepherd David and molds him into one of the greatest servants of the Lord the world has ever known. And God takes King Saul and shows him the virtue and blessing of modest, humble service. Saul comes to see that all his self-grandiosity had been misdirected, that in rising to a place of comfort and affluence, Saul lost sight of his role as a humble servant of the Lord. He just thought too much of himself.

It's like the college football coach whose star player was about to be sidelined because of poor grades. Knowing the pull he had around campus, the coach went straight to the chemistry teacher and demanded he not flunk his athlete. "Tell you what, coach," said the professor. "I'll ask him a question in your presence. If he gets it right, I'll pass him." The star athlete is called in, and the professor asks him, "What is H₂O?" "Water," says the player. And with this the coach cries out, "Oh no! Water? Give him another chance!" H₂O is water. And that coach isn't all that he thinks he is.

It doesn't matter if you're the influential coach in this scenario, the talented player, or the dutiful teacher, God has a role for all types of people, and often it's not the role we settle into in life. Often, we miss out on our greatest opportunity for growth and development by refusing to try something new, whether that's a stretch for us that we have to grow into, or a more humble, modest role that we've never bothered with before.

In discerning how best we can serve the Lord, we need to set aside our preconceptions about ourselves, about where we fit in. We need to be willing to consider something new, maybe something you're not sure you can do, or something you're not sure is worth your time.

David was selected as the next king of Israel because his heart was turned toward God. Whether he was tending sheep or leading men into battle, David kept his focus on serving the Lord in whatever way he could.

That's all the Lord asks of us, of you. Keep an open heart about how best to serve the Lord. Set aside your preconceived notions about what you can and should be doing. Take a moment to prayerfully consider serving when called upon to do so, or when something catches your eye that you've never done before; call or the church office to find out now you can serve in that role.

Now, maybe you're afraid you're not enough like the shepherd boy David? Set that fear aside. God will equip and enable you. Or maybe you're afraid you're too busy and overcommitted? Set aside that fear, also. And let none of us miss out on the opportunity to serve in a new way, no matter how great or how small. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, in every age, you call certain persons to defend the human family from oppression, tyranny and evil. Since our founding as a nation, countless American men and women have stepped forward to defend our country and to liberate those held captive.

Today we thank all our veterans – those who rest in honored glory, those who still suffer from the wounds of war, and those who, with us, enjoy the blessing of living in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

We are thankful for the selfless sacrifice of these veterans and of their families. Help us to remember them, to pray for them, and to care for them.

We pray, too, for those in our family of faith in need of your healing touch and your strength. And we thank, O God, for your gifts of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. May we continue to keep these rights available to all.

In God's most holy name we pray, as we lift our eyes to heaven and our voices in song for the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.