**Searching for a Heart of Gold**

**Text: 1 Samuel 16:7**

**Preached by Bruce D. Ervin**

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Our text this morning is taken from the story of the anointing of David. In 1 Samuel 16:7 we read: “The Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” More specifically, the Lord looks *into* the heart. Just as the Lord gazed through Samuel’s eyes, and looked into the heart of David.

I’m reminded of a man named E.C. Welch. You’ve heard me speak of Rosa Page Welch, the well-known Disciples singer and ambassador of goodwill. E.C. was her husband. He was home raising the kids and the grandkids and keeping house while Rosa Page was singing and teaching and mentoring around the world.

Mr. Welch could look into a person’s heart. He could see things inside of a person that you or I might miss. He knew that I was going to be a preacher long before I did. He knew something of both the evil and the good that dwelt deep within the people whom he encountered. Mr. Welch was a Black man with a college degree who came to Chicago in the 1920’s. He was an elevator operator. That was the best job that a Black man with a college degree could get in Chicago in those days. That tells you something about how deeply racism has been imbedded in the institutions and the hiring practices of this nation. Mr. Welch could’ve been very bitter about how he was treated over the years. But he had a heart of gold. He had a generous heart. And a faithful heart. And with God looking through the eyes of his heart, he could see into the hearts of others.

Just as God looked through the eyes of Samuel and gazed into the heart of David. There’s a backstory here that some of you may remember from Sunday School, but it bears repeating. Saul was the King of Israel; the first King of Israel. As we noted last week, there’d been a lot of debate about whether or not having a king was a good idea, but according to one version of the story anyway, God called the prophet Samuel to anoint Saul King.

It didn’t go so well. The King showed a lot of promise. But he put too much trust in his own judgment. Saul trusted his own judgment even more than he trusted God’s. So he went rogue on God and on the customs and norms of his day. Then he descended into some kind of mental illness. And God said, “Samuel, we’ve got to find ourselves a new king. So I want you to go down to Bethlehem, to the family of a guy named Jesse. He’s got 8 sons, and one of them will be king over Israel.”

Needless to say, it’s a dangerous thing to anoint a new king when you already have someone sitting on the throne. Especially when the incumbent has become unhinged. And it’s not like God gave Samuel clear instructions. There was something about pretending to offer a sacrifice to the Lord, but beyond that Samuel didn’t have a clue what he was supposed to do. But he set out anyway. Because Samuel had a faithful heart. God had looked into Samuel’s heart and figured that out way back when Samuel was still a young boy. Samuel had a faithful heart, so he stepped out in faith on this difficult mission for which he was given very few instructions. He must’ve figured that God was going to tell him what to do, and God would give him the resources with which to do it, when the time came.

So, Samuel arrives in Bethlehem. He invites Jesse and the whole family to this supposed sacrifice, and Jesse parades all of his sons past Samuel. First one to appear is Eliab. He looks like a king. Samuel’s thinking, “Hey, this is going to be easier than I thought. Here’s the guy.”

But God says, “Not so fast, Samuel. Look with me into the heart.” The first seven sons pass by Samuel, but none of them pass the heart test.

So the prophet says to Jesse, “Is that all you got?”

And Jesse says, “Well, I got this little guy out in the field. He’s watching the sheep and playing his harp and taking target practice with his sling-shot, but you’re not interested in him.”

And Samuel says, “Bring him in.”

So Samuel is looking at David. He too is a handsome lad, with his ruddy cheeks and amazing eyes. But God’s looking into his heart. And God says, “Samuel, that’s the dude.” So Samuel anointed David King; or at least, King-elect. And David, who had a strong heart, a passionate heart, a heart for leadership, a heart for the Lord, was gifted as well with God’s spirit.

God knew the heart of David. God knows our hearts. God looks into our hearts. And what God is looking for is a generous heart, a trusting heart and a faithful heart.

A generous heart is what we sometimes call a heart of gold. God, like singer/songwriter Neil Young, is searching for a heart of gold. God is a Miner for a heart of gold. “I want to live, I want to *give*” says Mr. Young in his song *Heart of Gold*. A generous heart is a heart that is fully alive. A living heart is a giving heart is a generous heart. And God is looking for a generous heart.

It’s not that God is particularly concerned about *what* you give, or *how much* you give, but that you have an *inclination* to give, and you *act* on that inclination. In the passage from Exodus 35 that Ramona offered as our Call to Worship, God is looking for a wide variety of gifts. All sorts of things are needed to create the tabernacle – that tent, that movable house of worship that we noted last week – all sorts of things are needed, and what matters is not so much what you bring but that you bring it. What matters is not how much you bring but that you give it with a generous heart. “Let *whoever* is of a generous heart bring the Lord’s offering.” That’s what God says through Moses. “There are varieties of gifts,” Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 12. There are material gifts and spiritual gifts. We can contribute time, talent and treasure: any one of these, or all of these. The particular gift that you offer for the work of the Church – the particular gift that you offer for God’s work in the world – is not the most important thing. One can give away all manner of things for the wrong reasons. Sometimes people give things in order to draw attention to themselves. We’re called to give in order to give glory to God, but sometimes people give in order to draw attention to themselves. And while the gift might come in handy, that’s not ideally the kind of gift that God is interested in.

God knows your heart. God is looking for a generous heart. God *wants* you to have a generous heart, because a heart this is overflowing with generosity is a heart that is fully alive. What’s important is not the nature of the gift or the amount of the gift, but that the gift comes from a generous heart.

God is looking for a generous heart, and a *trusting* heart. Indeed, a generous heart *is* a trusting heart. You see, the opposite of trust is fear. Either I trust God to provide the resources that are needed, or I’m afraid that there won’t be enough. I have either a trusting heart, or a fearful heart. Samuel had a trusting heart. Again, he was sent on that mission to find a new king without a clear set of instructions. But he trusted that God would give him what he needed, when he needed it.

A trusting heart is a generous heart. But a fearful heart tends to cling to the resources that God has given us. A fearful heart is always afraid that there won’t be enough. So there’s this tendency to cling to what you have, to hoard what you have, and to be reluctant to give anything away. The people gave generously to the creation of the tabernacle not only because God had gifted them with generous hearts but also because they had already seen how God provides. They’d been out in the wilderness for some time now and every morning the ground was covered with the manna – the ground was covered with the food – that they needed for that day. They had experienced the generosity of God – they had seen with their own eyes how God provides what is needed when it is needed – so they had come to *trust* that God would provide always They could *relax* into that trust. And in that state of calm and trust, their hearts were transformed from fear to generosity. A generous heart is a trusting heart. And God is looking for a trusting heart.

When I think of generosity and trust, I often think of my mentor, Dan Novotny. Dan’s parents were immigrants from Czechoslovakia and he was born in Prague. They never had much money, and Dan went into ministry at a time when churches didn’t pay very much. But talk about generous! He and his wife Jean opened their home to seminary students. There were so many joyous meals sitting around their dining room table. Dan loved books and he gave them away without hesitation. Years later after Dan died and I needed a place just to be for a while, Jean welcomed me into their home again. They never had very much. But what they did have they were glad to share. Because God had blessed them with trusting hearts, and generous hearts.

God is looking for a generous heart, and a trusting heart, and a *faithful* heart. Which was something that Saul didn’t have. A heart which is not faithful just goes off and does its own thing, without consulting with God or with those who might have some wisdom to offer, or with the folks who will be impacted by his or her actions. Saul’s heart was not faithful. God knew that, because God knows our hearts. God knew that, which is why God sent Samuel in search of a new king.

God is searching for a faithful heart. Because a faithful heart knows that it’s not about me, it’s about God. A faithful heart knows that to follow God into an unknown future is what we’re all called to do. A faithful heart is grateful for what is to come. Because whatever the future holds, God is already there, with the resources that we will need when we get there.

I mean, if Samuel had only a vague idea about what he was doing when he set out for Bethlehem, David didn’t have a clue. All of a sudden here’s this guy pouring oil on his head, for no apparent reason. And before long he’s playing his lyre for a troubled King Saul, and doing combat with the giant Goliath, and leading his men into battle, and upon the death of Saul and his sons David ascends to the throne. Who would have expected any of that from a young shepherd boy whose brothers seemed to have so much more to offer than he did?

David didn’t have a clue what the future held. Neither do we. But when we venture into the future with hearts that are generous and trusting and faithful, we *do* know that God will equip us with whatever it takes to complete the journey.

What’s in your heart? God knows. And when circumstances call for a generous heart, I trust that God will look at you, that God will look at me, that God will look at any one of us and say, “This is the one.” Amen.