

Bible readings: 1 Samuel 16:1-13 and John 9

Fourth Sunday of Lent 2017.

Outline:

- Opening story: FDR
- Introduction: Social Media & Tolerance
- Choosing Saul
- Jesse's sons... but one
- Choosing David
- Worldly Image in the Bible
 - Adam & Eve
 - Daniel
 - Jesus' miracle – John 9
 - Jesus' miracle – Mark 12 & Matthew 22
- American Indian story
- Prayer

Franklin Roosevelt once said:

- If you want me to speak for 10 minutes, I need three weeks preparation;
- For an hour, I need a week's preparation
- And if you want me to speak for three hours, I can start right now!

Lucky for you, Grant asked me to talk today three months ago – so I have a thirty second sermon!

Our sermon is about Image; as our reading says “outward appearance”. Today ‘image’ seems to rule our lives. It is not that “image” is unimportant, indeed, we are made in the likeness and image of God, but I’m talking about a *worldly* image.

Imagine I told you in, say, 1995, (the birth of the Frappuccino, the scroll wheel on your mouse, and the DVD) that twenty years in the future 2.5 billion people would be on social media? That the world's appetite for ‘image’ would be so important that all these people would have a private website devoted to themselves, that they would have multiple ‘selfies’ (wth is a ‘selfie’?), that you would share only those things that made you look most happy & attractive, and that an overwhelming majority of young ladies would purposefully pose with pouty “duck lips” in their photos... and proudly post them.

Imagine I told you that ‘good manners’ would become ‘political correctness’ and that ‘tolerance’ would no longer mean: “I disagree with you, but I recognize your democratic right to say it”. No, tolerance would mean: “Agree, affirm, and support me or you’re a bigot, racist, or some sort of ‘phobe’”.

We pay little attention to character and content, and more to worldly image.

That is where we are today, but the Bible tells us that this reality is not so very far away from 3000 years ago. I mean: Israel has got GOD as King – mediated by Judges... and that's not enough!?! (Samuel 10:19) You can imagine Samuel's talk with God: “You see, it's not you, God. It's us – we want a King like the other nations...”

As we read, Saul had been a disappointment as King. Initially, he was selected by the people for his broad shoulders, good looks, and pious demeanor.¹ In other words: his image. (The Jews wanted a King in the first place to “be like the nations” = image)

But Saul let’s his power run away with him a bit:

- He offers the Lord a burnt offering – usurping the privilege of Samuel
- He demands his troops take a silly and reckless oath “cursed be anyone who eats food before it is evening and I have been avenged on my enemies”
- He erects a monument to the Philistines as his own *personal* enemy rather than the enemy of the Nation

We see the cracks of corruption and instability

So Saul needs to be replaced and the Lord decides that one of Jesse’s sons will be the new King. He sends a reluctant Samuel there to anoint this new King and Jesse marches out his most qualified sons:

(Aside: you imagine you are, say, the key advisor to Saddam Hussein and God tells you, “Saddam’s no longer my pick, so will you be so good as to run on down to Mosul and anoint his successor?” You would be understandably nervous.)

So we start with Eliab – *to whom God is Father* – big, fair, muscular man, eldest son, and Samuel’s choice, “Surely the Lord’s anointed stands here before the Lord”!

And why not? – it is the same criteria for which Saul was initially chosen by the people – tall, head and shoulders above the rest, a physically imposing and handsome man exactly what Walt Disney would have cast as the Hero King. *Uiterlijk*.

The Lord’s response:

7 But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’

Then there was: Abinadab – *Father of a vow*

And then: Shammah – *Jehovah is there*

Seven, in all...

And that was it. None of them were what the Lord were looking for.

I’m sure some sort of awkward stillness fell on the company gathered there and – perhaps out of social discomfort – Samuel asked if there were any more sons.

Jesse answers that there is *one* more. (It is interesting that in the Bible 7 is Completeness, but the number 8 denotes Renewal)

Now, David does not seem to be a particularly attractive King to be – he was young (between 10 and 20)² so probably a teenager and later Saul’s battle armor was too much for him, so we can see he wasn’t fully

¹ And then by the Lord; it was the people’s initiative to have a king, “like the nations”.

² The Army did not take men younger than 21. David visits his brothers in 1 Samuel 17 who are in military service. It suggests he was younger than the serving age.

'filled-out'; ruddy: a reddish complexion probably from being in the sun tending sheep. He was sort of forgotten by his father, clearly not a favorite.

Whatever the reason, he was last, but he was God's choice. Not a choice based on image, on *uiterlijk*, but a choice based on character, spirit, and content. He had the 'heart' the Lord was seeking.



It is not only in Samuel where worldly image played a disproportionate role – from Adam and Eve covering themselves with fig leaves, to Daniel's Babylonian handlers worried that his diet would not produce the right image and that he would be thin and scrawny compared to the other youths, to the Jews wishing to "be like the Nations",

Man so often looks at 'form' rather than substance.

Even the questioning that Jesus and the anonymous healed man got from the Pharisees was more posturing and form than actually seeking the truth.

As a young man I lost control of my car. Went sideways not through a stop sign, but over the top of it, bounced over the road, tore through a fence, and took out a telephone pole. The police officer came and surveyed the situation. He said he was thinking about giving me a ticket for "failure to stop" ... I thought to myself, "You're going to have to give me a lot more tickets than that for what I've just done!"

In our Gospel reading, John 9, conformity to the Pharisee's ideal image was much more important than the miracle Jesus had performed. Perhaps Jesus thought the same as I did about the ticket, "Well, if you want to get me on this little violation, I've got a lot more!" You see the Pharisee's had let the Law be the Means and the Ends. In other words, the Law wasn't followed in order to be in God's will, but simply because the Law needed to be followed.

Do you remember the story of Mark 12 and Matthew 22? The Pharisees come to Jesus and ask: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" Of course they are ready to turn his "No" back to the Romans as *treason* or his "Yes" back to the Jews as *blasphemy*.

Can you feel the danger? What would you do? To be honest, I think I would stutter out some dumb anodyne answer or another. Jesus' answer is one that only a person fully and ultimately committed to God can give.

Jesus immediately senses that this is a trap. He calls for a coin and asks whose image is stamped on it. They answer, "The Emperor". Jesus replies: "So give to the Emperor what is his and to God what is God's."

A careful reading of this shows that we, too, can see the hypocrisy. We can see that the Pharisees were insincere and trying to trick him, because if they had been sincere, they would have followed up Jesus' response with:

"What is God's?"

As sure as I stand here, each one of you has an image stamped on his life – just like that coin. In the United States we have stamped on each and every coin: "In God We Trust". It doesn't mean much anymore – in fact, it should probably say: "In God We Trust; all others pay cash"!

So, "What is God's?" What I suspect Jesus would have asked them in response to the question is: "Whose image is stamped on *you*?"

[Pause]

I'd like to end this talk with a parable:

Once there was an Indian elder named Two Dogs. He described his own inner struggles by saying, "Inside of me there are two dogs. One of the dogs is evil, and bitter, and worldly. The other dog is good; loves his neighbor and loves God. The evil dog fights the good dog all the time."

When asked which dog wins, he reflected for a moment and replied,

"The one I feed the most".

[Pause]

Which dog did you feed last month? Week? Day? This morning?

Which one will you feed today? Next week?

Whose image is stamped on your heart and actions?

Let's have a brief moment of silence to pray about these things and renew our commitment to follow Christ

[Pause]

In the name of our Lord & Savior Christ Jesus. Amen.