



Poland Presbyterian Church

At the Green since 1802

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June 14, 2015

A Sermon by Brent J. Eelman

"The Enigmatic Logic of God"

I Samuel 16:1-13

The Lord said to Samuel, 'How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.' ²Samuel said, 'How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.' And the Lord said, 'Take a heifer with you, and say, "I have come to sacrifice to the Lord."' ³Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.' ⁴Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, 'Do you come peaceably?' ⁵He said, 'Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.' And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord.' ⁷But the Lord said 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.' ⁸Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, 'Neither has the Lord chosen this one.' ⁹Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, 'Neither has the Lord chosen this one.' ¹⁰Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, 'The Lord has not chosen any of these.' ¹¹Samuel said to Jesse, 'Are all your sons here?' And he said, 'There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.' And Samuel said to Jesse, 'Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.' ¹²He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, 'Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.' ¹³Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Two months ago, football fans were gathered around television sets watching what has to be one of the most boring sports events that ESPN has ever broadcast: three days of the NFL draft. Thirty two teams each selected 7 players from the ranks of college football. The purpose was, of course, improving their football team.

Considering the multi-million dollar salaries that are paid to these young athletes, making the correct choices is vital. A poor selection can set a team behind for years in terms of its development and future. To minimize the risks, the NFL has created a host of tests and metrics to determine who will succeed and who will not. Consequently the prospective players were put through all types of evaluations: Height, weight and other body measurements were carefully scrutinized. Physical tests were given including the 40 yard dash, bench press, standing high jump, broad jump, and a shuttle

run. They were interviewed extensively by managers, coaches, team owners and psychologists. They were given intelligence tests and something called the Cybex test that measures joint strength. Their amateur careers were carefully examined from grade school through college. They were screened for drugs and other personal problems. Why? NFL teams do not want to leave anything to chance.

And yet...the draft-day failures and busts are legendary. Consider all these heralded football players who were considered "can't miss prospects based upon the metrics" Brian Bosworth, Todd Marinovich, JaMarcus Russell, Ryan Leaf, Andre Bruce, Art Schlichter, Tony Mandarich, Andre Ware, and Tim Couch. Those are not household names, even in football crazed circles, yet each was a first round draft choice. Each was subjected to all types of scrutiny and the best logic that football minds could create. Yet each failed to make the grade as a regular NFL player. Ironically, there were some who were totally overlooked and undrafted, yet became all-stars: Kurt Warner, Brian Waters, Wes Welker, Tony Romo, and Shaun O'Hara.

We might conclude that there is something wrong with the logic that the coaches and managers use when they make their choices, but what other factors could be considered? Such is the logic of choice, be it choosing athletes, or leaders for companies, schools, and nations. Churches like Poland Presbyterian, that will be searching for a pastor, also want to make the right choice.

Make the right choice. This is at the heart of the story from the Bible today. It is a "draft day" story about the future king of Israel, and in that story we are confronted with the confusing and enigmatic logic of God. God often appears to making confounding choices.

During the time of Samuel, Israel was a nation in a precarious position. The threats came from all sides, but most notably from the Philistines. The Hebrew people knew this and desperately wanted a king who would lead them during this dangerous period. Today you heard the story of the choice of David, who was the second king of Israel. We can appreciate this story best if we first examine the failed reign of Saul as king of Israel.

Saul was the logical choice to be the king of Israel. He had all the right qualifications. He was from a well-established, wealthy family. His father was respected. Saul was good looking and in the words of the bible, he stood "head and shoulders above" all the other men of Israel. He was tall. He had stature and presence. Social scientists have concluded that during times of national distress, people have tendency to follow leaders who are tall. Saul was the logical choice....but despite some early success, he was ultimately a failure.

Consider David: He was not from an established family. He wasn't even from Jerusalem. He came from Bethlehem, a veritable hole in wall. His father, who raised seven other sons, was a sheep herder. But here is the real clincher: Even David's father, Jesse, did not regard him as having the "right stuff" for leadership.

The scene described in the story I read today has a comical feel. Jesse, the proud father, paraded his sons in front of Samuel, knowing that one of them would be chosen as the king. Samuel looked at these healthy, strong, brave young men ready to anoint one of them as king. But like a newscaster, with an ear bud in his ear taking direction from the producer, Samuel not only saw with his eyes, he listened to God and heard what God wanted to lead Israel. The first son passed by, and Samuel was sure that this was the one...but then he heard God reject him. The second son passed by and Samuel

was ready to anoint him, but likewise... God said, "no." Five more passed by and each was rejected, not by Jesse, not by Samuel... No...by God. Both Samuel and Jesse were flabbergasted.

Then Jesse remembered one other son, David. He was left in the field to watch the sheep, because he wasn't the logical choice. He was brought in from the field and God said "yes".... And Jesse poured the olive oil over his head, anointing him king. David, an afterthought, became the king of Israel: the greatest king of Israel

It is a story we discover again and again in the bible: the enigmatic logic of God. From the very beginning of the biblical story we are confounded by God's choices.

- God chose Abel's sacrifice over Cain's.
- God chose Sarah, an infertile elderly woman, to start a family and ultimately a nation.
- He chose the lazy Jacob over hard working Esau.
- He chose Moses, a murderer and fugitive.
- He chose Jeremiah, only a boy, to be the prophet to the nations.
- He chose Mary and Joseph, a teenage mother and an obscure carpenter as parents for his son.
- He chose 12 motley men, fisherman, tax collectors and a few others, to be his disciples.
- He chose the Samaritan woman at the well, married five times and living with one who was not her husband, to be the first evangelist.
- He chose crucifixion, (the death penalty!) as the means of bringing salvation and eternal life.

We get the picture... In the words of Peter:

"The stone which the builder rejected has become the cornerstone."

4 short lessons we can take from this story:

1. Today we ordain and install elders and deacons. We have gone through a prayerful discernment process that has led to the election of these individuals who will lead our congregation. Regardless of the process... I believe that behind the choices of these individuals is the still small voice of God... calling them to leadership.
2. Our human perception is at best limited and often flawed when it comes to judging other human beings.
3. We need to be careful who we write off, because God probably has not. Even his father, Jesse, wrote David off. Our world is filled with women and men who have been judged as incapable.... never given a chance; never chosen.

The story of Cinderella, (which appears in some form in most cultures), has staying power because it conveys a fundamental truth about human perception. In our search for treasures, we often overlook the diamonds that God has placed before us.

4. We need to be careful that we do not write off ourselves. I cannot tell you how many times I have counseled with women and men who have taken their self image from the erroneous

judgments of others. They have written off their own futures, and their own abilities based upon the logic of others. The logic of God has not written them off. God has not written you off!

It is a simple story of choice and the ones whom God chooses. It is an amazing story, because it often affirms those who are rejected by the wisdom of our world... yet chosen by the enigmatic logic of God. This is the good news. Amen.