

Sunday, March 19, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church

Bible Study

Psalm 23, 1 Samuel 16:1-13 and John 9:1-41

Fourth Sunday in Lent: “In the Presence”

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In groups of two or three, have participants respond to the following, “Name a time you were chosen (for a task, team, project, or something else).”

Psalm 23. Context. This psalm is perhaps the best known in the Bible, especially as it expresses the assurance of God’s love and presence in the face of death. It also expresses the idea that God will provide everything we need for life: food (“green pastures”), water (“still waters”), safety (“right paths”). God is the one who keeps us alive (“restores my soul”).

1 Samuel 16:1-13. Context. Saul was the first of the kings of Israel. The prophet Samuel, something of a king maker, had anointed Saul at the demand of the people. But Saul’s actions had displeased God and God rejected him. This week’s reading tells the story of how David came to be anointed, even while Samuel seemed unable to see what God saw, and Samuel’s man Saul was still a force to be reckoned with. The main point of the passage is that God does not see as we see: God sees the heart, not just outward appearance. And the one whom God chooses to rule the entire people of Israel is the eighth and last son of a man from an obscure family.

John 9:1-41. Context. Jesus’ healing of the man blind from birth gives rise to the most elaborated drama in John’s gospel apart from the drama of Christ’s passion itself (most often called his “exaltation”). The evangelist has masterfully told the story on two levels: first, this is the event in Jesus’ ministry which brought him into conflict with the Pharisees who were among the religious leaders of the day. Second it is the experience in the life of the evangelist’s own community after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE when Christians (and others deemed heretics whom the “Jews” – that is, the Jewish authorities) were for the first time being expelled from the synagogues and potentially subjected to persecution by the Romans. Jesus redefines “sin” not as a particular deed (the view of the disciples and the Pharisees), but as “spiritual blindness” – precisely the state of those who refuse to believe in Jesus.

Read Psalm 23, 1 Samuel 16:1-13 and John 9:1-41

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

Read Psalm 23, 1 Samuel 16:1-13 and John 9:1-41 again -

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

Some reflection questions –

- What might Samuel have felt after the seven older sons of Jesse were not chosen by God to be anointed? Frustrated? Surprised? Embarrassed that he thought wrongly?
- What do we learn about God from this passage? [1 Samuel 16:7]
- What is ironic about the story of the Pharisees arguing about the healing of a blind man?
- What similar themes from the 1 Samuel passage emerge in the John passage?
- How do these passages offer hope about how God chooses us?
- How do these passages invite us into a new way of seeing? What might it mean to see “with the eyes of faith”?

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Shepherd of our Souls, we confess that we fail to see where you are at work around us or even within us. Empower us to see with the eyes of faith. May we see abundance where others see lack, see the joy in the midst of sorrow, see peace instead of chaos, and hope instead of despair. May we see the hurts and pains of others and where your healing grace desires to bring new life. **Amen.**

And now we pray 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 trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.