

SCRIPTURE TEXT: 1 Samuel 16:6-13
SERMON TITLE: An Unlikely Choice

We are turning this morning to an Old Testament story set within a turbulent time of transition in the life of Israel. King Saul has displeased the Lord so God rejected Saul as Israel's king. God had a new king in mind, a king from Bethlehem, one of Jesse's sons. But exactly which son was not revealed, at least not at first. So God sent the prophet Samuel to Bethlehem to find and anoint this new king. At God's command, Samuel took along a heifer for a sacrifice.

Once in Bethlehem, Samuel first invited the elders of the city to the sacrifice because they were worried that Samuel might be coming to make trouble for them. Samuel then sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. We pick up the story at this point in 1 Samuel 16:6-13. Listen for the word of God. **SCRIPTURE STORY.**

Take a look at the photograph on the screens. **SHOW FIRST SLIDE.** This is the picture of a young Albanian girl taken in the early 1920s. The girl's name is Agnes. She was the youngest child in her family.

Now let me ask you: Do you see anything remarkable or distinctive about this young girl? Do you see any signs of future greatness in her appearance? I don't. She doesn't look powerful or in anyway special.

I suspect that if we had scattered out before us a hundred photos of young Albanian girls from the 1920s, there's absolutely nothing about Agnes that would set her apart or make her stand out. I certainly don't see anything in her appearance that suggests greatness. In fact, she appears quite ordinary to me.

But Agnes went on to do great things for God. **SECOND SLIDE.** At the age of 12, she was convinced that she should commit herself to a religious life. At 18, being a Roman Catholic, she joined the Sisters of Loreto as a missionary. She taught in India. On May 24, 1931, she took

her first religious vows to become a nun. She took the name Teresa.

In 1979, Mother Teresa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, "for work undertaken in the struggle to overcome poverty and distress." When she received the prize, she was asked, "What can we do to promote world peace?" She answered "Go home and love your family."

At the time of her death, Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity—the order she founded—had over 4,000 sisters, an associated brotherhood of 300 members, and over 100,000 lay volunteers, operating 610 missions in 123 countries. These included hospices and homes for people with HIV/AIDS, leprosy and tuberculosis, children's and family counseling programs, personal helpers, orphanages, and schools. The prime minister of Pakistan summed up her life by calling her "a rare and unique individual who lived long for higher purposes."¹

Who could have known given her outward appearance as young girl? Who could have known given her outward appearance as an older woman? She was short and hunched over with wrinkles marking her face. Who could have known?

Well, God knew because God doesn't look on human appearances or on the height of a person's stature. God's judgments are different than ours. God looks on the heart. **REMOVE SLIDE** This is how David became the king of Israel.

Samuel looked carefully at all 7 of David's older brothers. The eldest of the bunch must have looked the part of a king. When Samuel saw him, he thought to himself, *Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord*. But God said no. Six more passed by, and still no king.

Now apparently, no one in family had thought about the baby brother. They had left him tending the sheep. But Samuel had to check him out.

And when David appeared, he was handsome, but this was not about appearances, this

¹ "Mother Teresa," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother_Teresa (accessed on June 10, 2009).

was about the heart. *The Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.”* Samuel then anointed David with oil *and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.*

God’s really good at this sort of thing—making unlikely choices based not on outward appearances or human judgments, but on the heart. God chose Israel saying to them: *Once you were no people, but now you are my people.* Abraham and Sarah were an old, childless couple, and yet they were promised a son. Even though Esau was the older brother, God’s promise went to Jacob, the baby brother. In speaking of the Suffering Servant, the prophet Isaiah said, *he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him....and as one from whom others hide their faces.*

And then, of course, there’s Jesus, Mary and Joseph’s boy. Most people looking at him would have seen nothing special in his outward appearance. By that measure, he was just another face in the crowd. In fact, the early church even applied Isaiah’s prophecy about the Suffering Servant to him. But look at what God accomplished through this unlikely choice—through all of these unlikely choices! When the heart’s receptive and the Spirit comes—mighty things are accomplished for the kingdom of God by ordinary human beings!

So what about us? What does God see in us? What does God see in our hearts? Well, if it’s a matter of outward appearances and human judgments, I know all too well that I’m an unlikely choice—just like Mother Teresa and King David—and maybe you feel the same way.

But here I am. Here we are. God has chosen us; Christ has called us—and it’s not because of the way we look; it’s because God sees something in our hearts that the Spirit of God can use mightily from this day forward, to produce great things for the kingdom of God.