

Sermon for Cashmere Presbyterian
Sunday 13th June 2021
A Humble Heart

Text: 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 51

Introduction

Today we start a sermon series on one of the great stories of the bible – the story of the life of David, the shepherd boy who became King of all Israel. The sermon title is ‘the heart of David’. For the Hebrew people the heart was the seat of emotions, thinking and will. To look into the heart of another is to look into how they are feeling, what they are thinking and intending to do. It is a revealing insight into any the essence of any person. So we look into the heart of David. Today we look at his humble and contrite heart, next week his big and courageous heart, then the following week his soft and broken heart, and finally his exuberant and joyful heart.

And we do know a lot about the heart of David.

The bible is full of stories. In fact, 75% of the bible is in narrative form! Jesus himself used stories all time. God wants us to learn from the stories of people’s lives and their interactions with God!

And in this book full of stories, David takes pride of place. We know more about his story than anyone else! It is the longest story in the bible and it is backed up by the insights into the heart of the man through the prayerful poetry and song of the Psalms. Lets look into this story ...

Chosen

Most good stories have a back story. In this case it is a sad one. In contrast to the surrounding nations, Israel recognised God as their King. For 400 years prior to Saul and David becoming kings they had judges but now human crowned as King, God was their King. Typical of our human tendency to want to follow the crowd, the people eventually called out for a human king, just like everyone else has! God reluctantly agrees and the first King is chosen on looks! 1 Samuel 9 records that Saul was as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else.

But power went to that head. It quickly becomes all about him and he side lines God’s direction over his life and kingship.

So God is on the lookout for a new king. And he has this kingmaker working with him, a prophet called Samuel. Samuel is sent to a man called Jesse who has a fine array of sons, one of whom God has chosen to be the next king.

Then there is the wonderful image of the sons lined up like prize cattle on show day! Which one will get the red ribbon of first prize! At first glance, it seems it will be the oldest and not doubt the tallest and most striking of the sons, Eliab:

⁶ When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed stands here before the LORD.”

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.”

Or as Eugene Peterson records it in his fine book on the life of David Leap over the Wall:

Samuel's God-trained prophetic eye penetrated the surface appearance to Eliab's interior. There he didn't see much to write home about. No king material within.

I have the image of wearing glasses with special power to penetrate beyond the exterior to the heart of a person – all seeing inner sight!

Then the other brothers, each in turn, do not fit the bill! Eugene Peterson captures Samuel's thinking at this point:

"Samuel was bewildered. Had he missed a key element in God's message? Was he losing his prophetic edge? Did he have the right town? 'this is Bethlehem, isn't it?' Did he have the right family? You are Jesse. Aren't you?"

Well - there must be another son!"

David is chosen

The family then remember the 'baby brother'. That is how they refer to him at this time, not by name. He is easily overlooked, only a ruddy cheeked boy relegated to tending the sheep! And yet this baby brother is the one! He is chosen! He is anointed to be future King of Israel!

There is much personal insight for us to draw from this story:

1. Even I could be chosen by God!

David was ordinary and easily overlooked, even in his own family. But he was seen by God, chosen by God. And as his life is revealed for us in the rest of the story, he is in fact a very earthy and flawed individual, prone to mistakes and hindered by the consequence of those mistakes. We see that strikingly in the story of Bathseba and Uriah where David would shatter 4 of the commandments as he coveted his neighbour's wife, committed adultery with her, murdered her husband and lied to cover up!

This is what God chooses to work with here. It is this man's story that is the most featured in the Hebrew scriptures! It grounds us in our relationship with God. As Peterson puts it:

The David story, like most other Bible stories, presents us not with a polished ideal to which we aspire us with a rough-edged actuality in which we see humanity being formed – the God presence in the earth/human conditions. The David story immerses us in the reality that embraces the entire range of humanness.

Wow! There is hope for me with God yet!

2. God looks to the heart

However secondly the story hammers home that God does not judge by outward appearances!!

I overheard a quote from a tv programme on plastic surgery the other night that went something like this: 'Now that I have had all this work done, people are able to see the real me'

But God look to the inner qualities of a person for the real deal. Interestingly, the root for the word sincerity is associated with a practice where the Greek builders of gold statues

would sometime cheat by having a wax centre – the statues were passed off as solid gold but were not! And these cheat statues when under the pressure of the kind of sunshine heat that melts the tar on our road, would collapse. And so a word grew up to mean ‘without wax’ – that word is the root for our word sincerity. And so too God is looking for the inner qualities that mean that when the heat comes on, we will not have a melt down!

And so we read about David in Acts 13:22: *God testified concerning him: ‘I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart*

What is it about the heart of David that is so good? Because I want to be a man after God’s own heart – so show me God! And he does:

His heart is revealed in the biblical story of David – the most comprehensive and character revealing, warts and all biographies in scripture.

And, not only that, but in the Psalms, the songs and poetry of David we find his heart expressed in all its fullness.

So what do we see, how is his heart revealed in story and song?

There is so much revealed about the heart of David in the scriptures. Today, as we approach the communion table I want to focus on the **humble and contrite heart of David**.

We see this in David response to Nathan when he confronts David so cleverly about what happened with Bathsheba with the story of the farmer with many sheep who nevertheless steals his poor neighbours only lamb to slaughter for a feast. When hearing the story David burned with anger against the man. “I solemnly swear, as the LORD lives,” he said to Nathan, “the man who did this certainly deserves to die! ⁶And he must pay back four times the price of the lamb because he did this and had no pity.” (2 Samuel 9)

Nathan courageously calls out the king at this point – ‘you are that man’

It was courageous because this king had complete power to kill him for such a slight on his kingly power. Yet David is convicted and contrite! And in Psalm 51, said to have been written with David after this encounter he pours out his heart to God in humble confession:

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

And then at verse 10

Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

He sums this up in verse 17

My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you,
God, will not despise.

Down the road at Cashmere New Life I hear that they end each sermon with 2 questions:
What is God saying to me? And what am I going to do about it?

There is a huge connection here with us and our worship on this communion day:

And as we come to take communion we have the words of Paul to reflect on:

Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from
the cup (1 Cor 11:28)

For me the call is to look into our hearts in terms of the line in the Lord's Prayer that says
'forgive us our sins as we forgive others'

Lord, what is it that I need forgiveness for today? Where am I messing up? What hurtful
words have I spoken? Destructive deeds done or undone? Negative thought processes that
have been bring me down?

But there is also another part to the prayer – forgive me as I forgive others!

As I examine my heart before coming to this table, is there someone I need to forgive?

Remember the words of Jesus:

²³ "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your
brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the
altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5)

In this respect I am reminded on the incident when Saul was hunting David down and goes
into the cave where David was hiding to go to the toilet. It effectively place him defenceless
in the hands of David. Instead of taking revenge, David cuts a slither off Saul's garment and
later emerges from the cave to call to Saul a message of reconciliation! (1 Samuel 24)

Too often we can let the communion service pass us by as a thoughtless ritual. This is not
what God desires of us. Rather he desires the thoughtful contrition of an honest and humble
heart, for that is the kind of heart he can penetrate with his love, presence and relationship.

Today as we have communion we will pause to examine our hearts, to write on a piece of
paper something we are sorry for and bring this to the clay pot at the front of the church as
we come up to receive communion. At the end of the service the kids will take the pot outside
and burn up the paper.

For we read in Psalm 103: 11-12

For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.