

Fourth Sunday in Lent
Year A

1 Samuel 16:1-13
Psalm 23
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41

As we move through our lives, we encounter hundreds of people. Whether it is in a store, walking down the street, or at church, we meet people of all walks of life. What do we see? That is the question raised in our readings today.

Samuel did not have very good luck in his first attempt at finding a king for the people of Israel. When the people requested a king to rule over them, it appeared that God led Samuel to anoint Saul as the first king. Saul was head and shoulders taller than anyone else and was said to be very handsome. Surely, this was who God had chosen. However, after a great start, the power and prestige that came with being the king went to Saul's head and he became a tyrant. After he had usurped the role of the priest in offering the sacrifice (among other things), God refused to honor Saul as king and directed Samuel to try again.

Our reading for the Hebrew Scriptures today shows the effort Samuel went through to get it right this second time. Although he was afraid of Saul, Samuel went to Bethlehem under the pretext of offering a sacrifice and met with Jesse and his sons. However, it appears that Samuel had not fully gotten the message from God. When he saw Jesse's eldest son, he was sure this was the one because he was tall and handsome, just like Saul. But God reminded Samuel that there is more to a person than what we see. It was not until the youngest, the one almost forgotten even by his father, was brought in that God acknowledged that the future king had arrived. Even in this case, either Samuel or the narrator of the story seems to focus on the outward appearance. But God looked deeper and saw into David's heart.

Remarkably, we have a similar story in the Gospel reading. We see a man who was born blind. He didn't approach Jesus to ask for healing. He was just the topic of conversation because he was blind. The disciples pointed him out to Jesus as an object lesson about sin. What happened after his healing is even more astonishing. This man who had been blind was now under attack. His neighbors, those who had been around him all his life began to question if it was really the same man. He kept saying it was him, but they could not believe it.

If that was not enough, the religious authorities got into the act. How could he have been born blind and now see? They hadn't healed him and they were the authorities. If he claimed it was Jesus who did this, they would reject him from their midst. So, they questioned his parents. Probably out of fear of the authorities, these parents who should have been rejoicing with their son in his good fortune, declined to get involved. They washed their hands of the situation.

This man, who had been blind and had been healed by Jesus, was now shunned by all except Jesus. No one, even his parents and those with whom he had grown up, would acknowledge him. As the neighbors said, this could not be the same guy. The man they knew was blind.

How often do we see people only by what we perceive as something different in them? Perhaps it is someone in a wheelchair. Do we really notice the person, or just the chair? Do we only notice the white cane, and not the person carrying the cane? There are scores of attributes on which we might focus instead of the person who has those attributes. We fail to see the person. Our challenge is to focus on the individual and not see only that which might be different about them. As we show our love for them, we need to see them as unique people of God's creation and not just one of their attributes.

Samuel saw a tall handsome man in the person of Saul, and in the person of David's older brother, and determined these men would make a good king for Israel. The neighbors in the Gospel story saw a blind man who needed their sympathy and not a person who was loved by God. As we interact with people in our lives, it is imperative that we see each one as a child of God who desires to be loved by us unconditionally. That is the example Jesus gives us.