

13 June 2021 – Leadership 2

BIBLE READINGS

1 Samuel 16:1-13

The Lord said to Samuel, 'How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.' But Samuel said, 'How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me.' The Lord said, 'Take a heifer with you and say, "I have come to sacrifice to the Lord." Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate.' Samuel did what the Lord said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, 'Do you come in peace?' Samuel replied, 'Yes, I come in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.' Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord.' 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.' Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, 'The Lord has not chosen this one either.' Jesse then made Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, 'Nor has the Lord chosen this one.' Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, 'The Lord has not chosen these.'

So Samuel asked Jesse, 'Are these all the sons you have?' 'There is still the youngest,' Jesse answered. 'He is tending the sheep.' Samuel said, 'Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.' So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the Lord said, 'Rise and anoint him; this is the one.' So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.

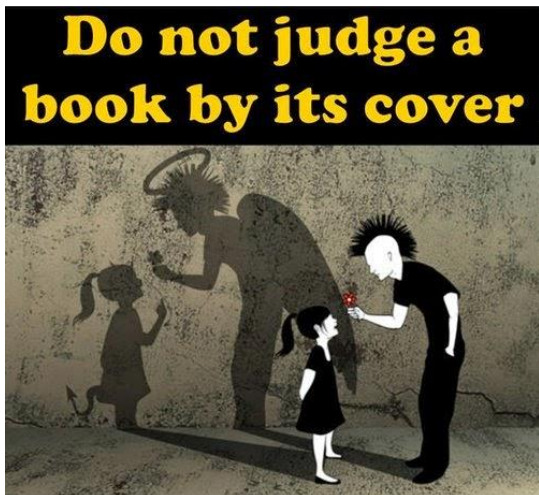
Mark 4:30-34

Again Jesus said, 'What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all

seeds. Yet when it is planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.'

With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

MESSAGE Choosing leaders - what really matters



There's an old proverb that says: 'don't judge a book by its cover'. Nor by its catchy title. In fact, if you want to get a sense of a book you probably need to look at its table of contents and perhaps read a chapter ... which is why if you go to the Amazon website to buy a book online they allow you to do exactly this – try before you buy.

Today's Bible readings back up the proverb – just because something is small and unimpressive to look at – like a mustard seed – or someone is young and unqualified – like David the shepherd boy – doesn't mean that they don't have an important place in God's way of working in the world. In fact, God often seems to delight to work through ordinary and unassuming people and shows up in the most unexpected places.

So in our series exploring **leaders** and **leadership**, a key question that arises from today's Samuel reading is this ...

How do we choose leaders? What criteria do we use?

First, though, some background. Last week we saw the prophet Samuel debating with the people about the merits of a king. They want a king to lead the army and unite the tribes, someone inspiring to follow. Samuel argued **against** a king, suggesting they will become greedy and corrupt.





Samuel listens to the request of the people, though, and after following God's prompts, anoints **Saul** as the first king over Israel. Saul is tall and imposing and starts with great promise – he's courageous, takes initiative, wins some victories in battle and is reasonably popular. From a marketing perspective that focuses on outward appearances and photo opportunities he's a fine choice as leader of the nation.

But then some serious flaws start to show through – Saul is overly anxious about other people's opinions of him and becomes steadily more impulsive, moody and unconcerned with God's ways. Samuel senses that God has lost patience with Saul and wants to appoint an **alternative king**, which of course puts Samuel in a rather delicate situation – as any move to find a new king will be seen as treason by Saul. It also raises the awkward possibility of whether God sometimes makes mistakes ... or is it Samuel? ... and as a leader, how do we deal with mistakes that will inevitably happen?

God speaks to Samuel once more and urges him to go and anoint one of Jesse's sons to be the new king – **but how will Samuel choose between them?** Will a future leader necessarily look like a repeat of a past leader ... or is change needed? This is something that long term Collingwood coach Nathan Buckley discovered this week.

It turns out that Jesse has **eight sons!** Samuel is initially influenced by their **outward appearance** – surely God will choose the tallest, or strongest, or most qualified person for the task. Samuel is also guided by **his past experience** ... if Saul was chosen by God based on his imposing physical appearance and skill as a soldier, then presumably his replacement needs to be similar?



None of Jesse's sons seems quite right to Samuel ... until the youngest – **David** – who is at most 15 years old but who may be as young as 11 or 12 years old – is fetched from his shepherd duties. We know how the story turns out ... David is the one chosen, the one who will

slay Goliath, and who will eventually become the future king of Israel, the one who will unite Israel's tribes and establish Jerusalem as the permanent location for the Temple. But just like King Saul before him, David will also show some serious character flaws – highlighted by his adultery and his dysfunctional family.

Why does God choose David to be king? The insight we're offered is that God **looks on the heart** and sees in David **a person after God's own heart**. In ancient thinking, the heart was considered the **seat of emotions, thinking and wisdom**, as well as our more modern usage of the heart revealing our **inner life and integrity**.



From what we learn later, David became a fearless warrior and a strategic thinker. But for the writer of Israel's history, what mattered more than these skills was David's **heart for worship** and his continual seeking after God through **prayer**, evidenced by the large number of psalms attributed to David. It was these qualities of seeking God, trusting in God and worshipping God that made him a person after **God's heart**.

All of which makes me wonder how **we** choose leaders in the church. Do we primarily look to a person's **skills, qualifications and experience**, how they speak, what they've accomplished? Or do we choose a person because they're prepared to **offer their time?**



Or do we try to go a little deeper and seek to discern **how they relate to God** – their inner prayer life, their worship life, their trust in God?

My hunch is that we tend to look more to skills and availability rather than their inner life. But the lesson being offered from Samuel's experience is that the outward aspects and skills of a person only go so far. The qualities that are usually hidden from our eyes – like faith, compassion and intimacy with God – may be of far greater importance in the long run – as they reveal what's in a person's heart.

So when we try to fill some of the leadership positions at Croydon that I mentioned last week, for instance, do we **overlook** people for various reasons – too young, too inexperienced, too busy, wrong background or gender? and do we consider what we might term ‘**spiritual**’ criteria – things like heart attitude for worship and prayer and mission, and trust in God?

Turning briefly to the parable of the **mustard seed**, we hear a similar message – a **small, unimpressive seed** – easily overlooked – grows into something much larger and more substantial when planted – that may even threaten to overrun the garden and spread into the neighbourhood. Again, the potential God has hidden **inside** the seed is more important than its outward appearance.



What lessons might we learn from the humble mustard seed?

First, small beginnings can lead to something quite significant. Due to Covid restrictions last year we began meeting by **Zoom** – out of both necessity and convenience. As time went on, we became more competent and confident in using Zoom. When we returned to onsite worship, we decided to keep the Zoom option going for those unable or unwilling to return to face-to-face worship. And in the last fortnight it’s been a fairly seamless transition back to Zoom. But perhaps Zoom has allowed more than this ... it has allowed us to **connect with people living far away from Croydon** and to **connect with people who found us through Facebook**. Looking forward, Zoom and **online worship** may help us connect with a whole new cohort of people. From little things, big things can grow ...



A second lesson from the mustard seed is that God works through seemingly **weak means** as well as through **power** and **strength**. One has only to look at the ministry of Jesus or the emergence of the early church to realise how true this is. The upshot is that God can and does use **each** of us to spread the light and love of

Jesus in our community. We all have a part to play as Paul explains in Romans chapter 12 ...

GOD HAS GIVEN EACH OF US DIFFERENT GIFTS TO USE. IF WE CAN PROPHECY, WE SHOULD DO IT ACCORDING TO THE AMOUNT OF FAITH WE HAVE. IF WE CAN SERVE OTHERS, WE SHOULD SERVE. IF WE CAN ENCOURAGE OTHERS, WE SHOULD ENCOURAGE THEM. IF WE CAN GIVE, WE SHOULD BE GENEROUS. IF WE ARE LEADERS, WE SHOULD DO OUR BEST. IF WE ARE ABLE TO HELP OTHERS, WE SHOULD DO IT CHEERFULLY. (ROMANS 12:6-8 CEV)

God's kingdom grows wherever people look to God for inspiration and direction. This may well come through our leaders, but may also come through other folk who faithfully pray, and who discern where God is calling us to go. What's on the **inside** matters just as much if not more than what's on the **outside** ...

- David was just a boy when God started to work through him
- The tiny mustard seed grows into a large and spreading shrub
- We are part of a relatively small church, and in the world's eyes it's comprised of mostly unremarkable people ... but people through whom God can and will do remarkable things

Let's pause now and pray for a moment ... to reflect and to wait on God's word of encouragement to us of how **each** of us might help bring a little more of God's kingdom into our neighbourhood. And also to reflect on who among us God may be calling into positions of leadership ... and what criteria we might use to choose our future leaders?