

“Picking the ‘One’”
Sermon by Lisa Crismore
John Knox Presbyterian Church – June 10, 2012

1 Samuel 15:34-16:13

Have you ever seen the show “American Pickers”? It is about these two guys who travel all over the United States looking through people’s old junk and finding these interesting treasures. Many times they are sent by their gal, who runs their shop but sometimes they just find these places by happen stance. They are in it to make money but I think there is more to it. They enjoy meeting the people that have spent most of their lives collecting old stuff. They enjoy digging, climbing and searching for the pick. There are times when I wonder what they see in some of this old junk! What I think would be a good find is usually not what they think is valuable. But they are the professionals and they know what the real deal is!

The prophet Samuel has been sent by Yahweh to find the real deal. A prophet in those days did not have an easy job. One of their jobs was to hold the people accountable and that included kings! Saul had been disobedient to God and Samuel had to dethrone him. As Walter Brueggemann says, “Samuel was the king maker and the king breaker.” (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching – First and Second Samuel; by Walter Brueggemann; John Knox Press; 1990; p. 121) With Saul gone, Israel was in need of a new king. Samuel was told to go to Bethlehem to anoint this person. Samuel is not too thrilled about this mission. In fact, he tells God that he is afraid that the people will kill him. People knew what he had done to Saul. People knew Saul would not be too pleased when the new person took over the kingship. Could Saul be watching Samuel’s every move? So, God tells Samuel to go with a sacrifice and tell the people that you are there to worship with them. But you must request the presence of Jesse and his sons for one of them will be king.

Now you can imagine that the Bethlehemites are not too thrilled when Samuel rolls into town. They seemed to be relieved after they hear why Samuel is there and they go to summon Jesse and his boys. The parade of sons begins. They show themselves to Samuel. The first three are presented by name. Samuel thinks they are all very fine. They are tall and handsome. One of these have to be the one. But God says, “No”, “No” and “No”. All seven go by and God gives the thumbs down every time! God does not look upon the outside of a person but it is the heart that counts! God knows the real deal! God knows the one Samuel should pick. None of these will do!

Samuel begins to wonder what is going on and so he inquires if there are anymore? Jesse says, “Yes, I have another son but he is very young. He is very small. We call him a runt!” He is out in the fields tending the sheep. Samuel tells them to fetch him because no one is going to leave here until this is finished. They wait! It had to have taken awhile to go get David. Can you imagine all the elders and the rejected sons sitting around waiting while Jesse sends for his youngest? They all know David. They all know how small he is! They all know he has no experience. You wonder if they were shaking their heads...no, no, this cannot be. Are you sure Samuel that you want David? Are they trying to talk him out of wanting to see David?

David arrives on the scene and it is immediate that Samuel receives confirmation from Yahweh that this is the one! God has looked on the heart of David. God’s Spirit is given to David once he is anointed with the oil. David is chosen by God. The picking is complete! But who would ever guess that this small, lowly shepherd boy would be the one who God would pick. It was the most unlikely choice.

What would we do, if we were in Samuel’s shoes? When was there a time that you went out on a limb and pick the most unlikely person for the job? I remember during my FedEx recruitment days. There had been a man apply for a courier position. He had passed all the main requirements but

the problem was he had a beard. The manager did not want to hire him as this was against company policy. When I asked if he would shave his beard, the man explained that he really wanted to work for FedEx. But because of his religious beliefs, he could not do this. I told the manager he had to hire him. We are an equal opportunity employer and there is no reason to reject him. It was going to be difficult as everyone would want to know why this man could have a beard and they could not! The manager did not want to deal with this but he realized he did not have a choice. We hired the man. Several months passed before I had to return to that station. When I went back, I asked how he was doing. The manager said he was one of the best new couriers he had ever had. The beard had never been an issue because this guy had a heart of gold. He would always pick up extra routes and help stranded couriers with their pick-ups or deliveries. He had gained the respect of all the employees.

We all find ourselves walking in Samuel's footsteps. Aren't we all prophets in some way, picking people for jobs, picking people to be our friends and our enemies, picking our spouses or picking people for sports teams? I was wondering what would have happened if the Colts would not have picked Andrew Luck for the NFL draft. People would have thought we were crazy, right? I enjoy the movie "Moneyball" with Brad Pitt. There is this wonderful scene where Brad Pitt's character is in a room with the recruiters of a pro baseball team. He is telling them that they are going to have to hire these various people to rebuild the team. They look at him like he is crazy! They say we don't want that player because he has a bad leg or that player is too old or that one has had personal issues. Brad says we are going to have to do things differently around here and so he hires them. This team comes together and begins to win! They are able to do amazing things!

How do we in the church pick people to serve? Do we look for the ones who will just say "yes" or do we look at their gifts and their heart. As prophets of the church, we are called to listen to God and pick those that will serve. Yes, many times people will come forward but there are times where it is our duty to invite and ask those to serve. Have you ever been asked to serve in the church and you wonder why on earth are they asking me? I'm sure it is because they see the gifts that are needed to do the job. Have you said "yes" and been surprised at the work of the Spirit to lead you to success?

One of the things I really like about my call here at the church is seeing when someone is affirmed in their role in the church. It has been a task given to us by the Finance Ministry Team to look at our budget for next year in a different way. We are setting the budget numbers by how these classes, projects, events or whatever the case are changing lives. The Education team met this last week and we talked about this. Everyone around the table could share times when what they did in the church had changed another person's life. Aren't we, the church, in the business of changing lives? We are called to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with our neighbors. And in the midst of sharing, it is not only their lives that our changed but our lives as well. But it takes all of us at John Knox. Last week we learned about the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. We all have these amazing gifts that the spirit gives to us and we must use them. Now they are all different gifts.

It was interesting to reflect on the balloons from Pentecost. In the pictures that Frank posted on Facebook, most of the balloons gravitated toward the dove window. Some floated around independently. For us in the first service, we experienced the one that got in the light and popped. The clean-up brought on more reflection. Most of the balloons came down on their own throughout the week. Some of the diehards had to be retrieved with a stick on Thursday. Then there were those few whose string got wrapped around the lights or found their rest on the back ledges. These all took some work in getting them down.

The differences in the balloons are parallel to the differences in the people releasing them. But we all make up the church and we are all called to share our gifts. You and I are the prophets that are called to see that the people are serving. Samuel knew the importance to go to Bethlehem and faithfully follow God's wishes to anoint David.

Later today, you will be invited up to be anointed with oil. When you receive the mark of the cross on the back of your hand think about how God calls you to serve in the church. How will you respond? Will you be ready to accept the call? This last week I read an article by Gradye Parsons, our stated clerk for the General Assembly. He was reflecting on his call to ordination as a minister of word and sacrament. He will be celebrating his 33rd anniversary soon. He says, "This denomination took me in from my Methodist roots and nurtured me in the theology of Calvin. This church drew me into a wider world of service to others, seen and unseen. It was this church that held me when my heart was broken and my horizons looked dim. It was this church with all of its flaws that loved me with all of mine. It is in this church that I made my vows. I would gladly do again - with an even louder "I do" and "I will." (<http://www.pcusa.org/blogs/stated-clerks-column/2012/5/31/june-2012-i-do-and-i-will/>)

Thanks be to God for all the faithful who seek out the good hearted and ask them to serve. Thanks be to God for those who accept the call even though they may have no idea why they are the one. Amen.