



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“WHAT DOES GOD SEE IN YOU?”

Scripture Lessons: 1 Samuel 16:1-13; John 9:1-12

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, August 23, 2020
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

John 9:1-12

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, ‘Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?’ Some were saying, ‘It is he.’ Others were saying, ‘No, but it is someone like him.’ He kept saying, ‘I am the man.’ But they kept asking him, ‘Then how were your eyes opened?’ He answered, ‘The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, “Go to Siloam and wash.” Then I went and washed and received my sight.’ They said to him, ‘Where is he?’ He said, ‘I do not know.’

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Let us pray...

Almighty and Everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing, acceptable, and even joyful in your sight, for you are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

For many students, school is about to begin - or it has begun already – and, while traditional recess may not be a part of their day in and day out, it will probably return before too terribly long...hopefully sooner than later. This is coming from a person who really loved recess as a child. Probably my favorite subject for a few years, partly because I had so much energy and I needed that release. But, if I am being honest with you, recess came with a heightened measure of anxiety because that’s when teams were often picked.

It is a fairly typical scene...the captains for the next game are chosen, and then everyone else sort of lines up and waits for their opportunity to join a team. Some students scoot rather quickly to their squad as if to get there before the captain changes his/her mind; others are a little more slow and deliberate, a little braggadocio, with fist pumps and giving their new teammates an assortment of high fives; still, for others, all they can do is wait.

Perhaps this has happened to you. It seems people are always picked first, right? We experience that in a variety of ways. I suppose that sometimes they know the captain and so it is a matter of chemistry or familiarity; of course, sometimes it is a matter of popularity. On a previous day, they demonstrated that they were actually good at whatever the group was about to play or it could be that they looked like they were good! Whatever the case may be, it has been my experience that be we on the playground or in the public square, most of us know what it feels like to not be picked first.

Maybe in recent memory, it was friends who formed a cohort of students to get together to safely learn, but that invitation just didn't come for you or your child; perhaps it came in the form of someone who was picked first for a promotion, and advancement in your vocation. You know, it's bad enough to have those feelings of deflating and sinking when it comes to school or work, but what about in the sanctuary; what about with respect to the sacred? I say that because there are actually people out there in the world today who feel that God could not possibly want them on His team. They have seen who's been chosen – they have observed the heroes and the heroines of the faith – but, for whatever reason, they have it in their minds that they can never measure up; mistakenly presume that the drama of redeeming love constitutes a stage on which they cannot stand. When faced with that kind of diminished spiritual self-confidence, what can the church provide? What can we say? What are we supposed to tell those people who believed that God would never pick them, or that God doesn't want them at all?

Well, to begin, let us tell them the story of the time God chose David. It comes to us from this morning's Old Testament Lesson and it took place many years ago and at a time when God was looking for a new king for Israel, and, knowing what we know about God, and knowing what we know about kings, we have some sense of the kind of person God would be after. It is natural for us to assume that such a potential king would come from good stock. What's more, a natural candidate for the King of Israel would surely be someone who had some age and life experience under their belt, someone who had exhibited a certain measure of leadership among his peers; someone who had demonstrated at least quiet ambitions of being a king. Oh, there's no doubt that God could have picked any number of qualified people to be king...but instead of focusing on a distinguished bloodline or on what we might consider to be kingly experience, God focused His attention elsewhere. While seven of Jesse's sons strutted back and forth waiting to be chosen, some of who we gather were tall and handsome, God looked beyond them all – all the way to the heart of a young boy named David. And what makes this scene even more amazing is that David was not even on the field to be picked...he was off somewhere taking care of the sheep.

That's precisely the story that I want to tell anyone who feels as though they are never picked first or questions if they are worth a pick at all! I want them to know that God is not preoccupied with what the world sees; God is not preoccupied with the value that we so often place on someone or something. I want them to understand something of the extent to which God has gone to love them! I want them to know that God's love is so relational and so personal, that when we experience the love of God from the one who knows us and searches us...the very Living God...when we claim that love for ourselves – it is so great and so encompassing, that from our vantage point, it is as if we are the only ones to love...the ones to be picked.

Consider the sacraments of Christ's Church – both of which we celebrate this morning – they testify to how God has chosen us and claimed us as his own. While we baptize Isla this morning into future repentance of faith, and while we look forward with great joy to that time when she will make her own profession of faith, we also celebrate that she is already picked...already loved...already blessed! And when we gather around the Lord's table in a few minutes, we will, once again, affirm God's saving work in His son, Jesus Christ, and how that redemptive love is for the world, it's for all of us...not just the heroes and heroines of the faith. God spared not his own Son but gave him up for "all" of us, so that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. That's what God wants us to know; yet how often is it that we allow our situations and our circumstances and what others have to say about us – that we allow those things to determine our value rather than God!

Take our New Testament Lesson, for example. The disciples ask the question: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" It's not a crazy question in that day and age. People really thought sin caused an ailment. The point I want to emphasize though is that this "blind beggar" as the Bible refers to him, he is not the kind of person that people pick for their team. He is not the kind of person picked for much of anything at all, and that makes for a sad story. But I'll tell you what compounds the sadness for me, and it's not that this man has spent his whole life up until now begging for scraps...it is not even that the world had ceased to view him in all intents and purposes as a child of God. What really breaks my heart is prior to this man's healing, he probably believed those things about himself!

He probably believed in his heart that all he was - all he amounted to - was a blind beggar. He probably believed that God was against him or at the very least had abandoned him. He probably believed that, for him, there was nothing to look forward to in life! But he was about to receive a miracle...Jesus Christ would heal him and save him, and this man would come to know and believe that those who love the Lord and who are called according to God's purpose, for them, the future is fresh and new.

George Matheson, in his great hymn, *O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go*, he penned the following words: "O joy that seekest me through pain, I cannot close my heart to Thee; I trace the rainbow through the rain, and feel the promise is not vain that morn shall tearless be." Now those words by themselves are certainly meaningful, but they are even more profound when we consider that Matheson was blind and that he couldn't even see the rainbow about which he professed.

One of the most significant gifts that we receive as children of God is the knowledge that we are children of God! And while the world would seek to identify us in other ways...calling us orphans, or widows, or addicts, or disappointments, or black, or white, or any other identifier...God in Christ calls us children...forgiven and loved! That is the truest form of our identity. That is who we are! And when we come to know this - by grace through faith - we also come to know and believe that God has chosen us from before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. This certainly doesn't mean that we will not experience difficult times. It doesn't mean that, on this side of heaven, we won't occasionally be picked last, sometimes not at all. But it does mean this -- that none of us were created in order to beg for spiritual handouts...that is not the lot of a child of God! God desires that we live together as heirs of the gracious gift of life – chosen and beloved, knowing in our hearts that with God, there is always a

future, even when as yet we may not be able to see it. Is that what you see? I hope so, because that is what God sees...and a blessed child of God is what God sees in us!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.