



Fourth Sunday Lent 2005

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

The Gospel of today is a masterpiece of storytelling and with that other gem from the book of Samuel we have the makings of a feast.

From Samuel we have the selection of a new king for Israel and from John the healing of a feisty blind man.

Each of these stories offers much for our delight and reflection. Samuel is directed to visit the house of Jesse of Bethlehem to look for a new king. Saul, who is King, has not been faithful and so he has been rejected.

Samuel goes with misgivings. Although he is a Seer, he goes without knowing what the outcome will be. He is also afraid that Saul, descending into madness, is still capable of causing harm.

Jesse places his seven grown-up sons before Samuel. All are fine, strong men, capable of leadership. Samuel looks at them one by one and senses that none is the choice of God. Finally, Samuel asks Jesse if there is another son. There is, but Jesse had not thought to include him because he was young and immature compared to the others.

When David is brought before Samuel, the Seer recognises that here is the choice of God. He anoints David and he is Spirit filled. The whole family can now partake of a blessing banquet.

The story of Jesus' encounter with the man, born blind triggers a fascinating debate between religious experts and an "ignorant" layperson. The debate highlights how people can become rigid in the ways they view their religion. The disciples along with the people of the time accepted as fact that a person born with a disability was inheriting the results of parental sin.

Jesus opened the eyes of the one born blind. This was seen as a challenge to accepted belief. First, it had not been done before and second, it was equivalent to forgiving the sin.

Jesus takes no part in the debate. He doesn't need to as the healed man manages very well for himself. He may have spent his years in physical darkness but his inner world was filled with light.

The new "seer" had made the connection between his healing and the action of God, the true healer. The religious leaders refused to see outside their own narrow boundaries, boundaries that they had erected themselves. Rules are necessary for

the well-being of a community but when they exist to be of benefit they become chains that bind.

Hearing of the debate and how the leaders have been shown up, Jesus goes in search of his defender. Jesus asks him if he believes in the Son of Man. This title was used of the Messiah as judge. The man replies that he is willing to believe and Jesus claims the title as his. Jesus confirms the healed man with his authority to judge the rightness of his understanding. The healed man had already recognised the authority of God in Jesus.

The religious experts recognised that they had been tested and found wanting and they resented it. Blindness in matters of faith is not a sin, but sin does lie in claiming to have authority while refusing to be open to the new.

We can now see what links the two stories.

Samuel, a Seer, identifies David as the new King.

The healed man, a new seer, identifies Jesus as Prophet, man of God and Son of Man.

Both men reveal the truth that the way God sees, is not the way we see. God looks into the heart and does not rely on externals. We are called to be seers, to give up the rigidity of a faith that does not allow for the movement of the Spirit. We are inheritors of the Vision. Our response to that light may bring us into conflict with those who choose darkness. The Spirit that fills us is the Spirit of courage.

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