

How we appear to God

Exodus 2:1-10

2 Cor 1:3-7

Our Old Testament lesson serves to remind us (as if we needed reminding) that the Lord views things very differently to the way we do as humans. The background to our Old Testament reading lies in the desire of the people of Israel for a king so that they could be like the other nations. Eventually the Lord acceded to their calls and Saul was anointed as king over Israel but despite being an impressive young man, without equal in Israel, Saul lacked the spiritual qualities to be king over Israel and he soon turned far from God and his calling.

At the very end of Chapter 15, we read that the Lord was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel.

Now in chapter 16, we have the account of how Samuel comes to anoint the one who would be the next king of Israel in succession to Saul.

Samuel is initially afraid to obey the Lord's command to anoint one of the sons of Jesse of Bethlehem's as king for fear of what Saul would do to him as soon as he heard what he had done (for indeed it was tantamount to treason to anoint someone else as the one who would be king while Saul remained on the throne).

The Lord reassures Samuel that he will be protected and so he follows the Lord's commands – takes a heifer and calls on Jesse to come to the sacrifice.

Seeing Eliab, the first of Jesse's sons standing before him, Samuel thinks yes, he must be the one for he was tall and of fine appearance but the Lord says no – the Lord doesn't look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

Seven of Jesse's sons pass before Samuel but the Lord has chosen none of them. Samuel asks Jesse if he has any other sons to which he replies that there is the youngest but that he is out tending the sheep. Samuel has him sent for and when he comes in, the Lord tells Samuel that he is the one, rise and anoint him and so it is that David is anointed as the one who would, one day, be king over Israel.

Of course David himself turned out to be far from perfect when he did eventually ascend to the throne. His adultery with Bathsheeba and his deliberate scheming to have her husband murdered in battle put asking your wife to take your speeding points whilst still a criminal offence very much into perspective but fundamentally, David was a good king and his reign marked the high point in Israel's history, a time looked back to down the centuries with a great sense of nostalgia in some of the same way that in this country many look back at the Victorian era as the time when Britain and the British Empire reached it's zenith. Yet after 40

years, David's reign came to an end with his death and his body was laid to rest in Jerusalem..

Around 1000 years later at the time of the first census undertaken whilst Quirinius was governor of Syria a descendant of David was born in Bethlehem to a girl named Mary, pledged to be married to a man called Joseph.

In appearance and upbringing, this boy was indistinguishable from any other at the time –we know nothing about what he looked like, how tall he was, how he did at school for these are all the things that as humans we place store by. Indeed, because there is no reference to his appearance, Jesus must have been physically utterly unremarkable. But God continues to look not at the outside but within to know our hearts and minds.

Whatever his outward appearance, inwardly Jesus was utterly pure and without sin and unlike David who was a great military leader and made Israel top nation for a while yet ruled for a mere 40 years, Jesus' kingdom will last to the very end of time. Although Jesus lead no armies into battle, he won the ultimate victory over sin and death, defeating the power of sin on Calvary's cross and destroying the power of death as he rose again on Easter Sunday morning.

So, as we prepare to remember again Christ's death on the cross and to celebrate his resurrection, let us pray that as God looks within each of us he will find not the arrogance of self will but the heart of a thankful and repentant sinner who acknowledges their debt to Jesus for all that he has done to set us free from the bonds of sin and death.

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