

PARENTING A REVOLUTION

I Samuel 15.34-16.13

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1 Samuel 15.34-16.13

³⁴ Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul.

³⁵ Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel.

Samuel Anoints David

¹⁶ The LORD said to Samuel, 'How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.'

² Samuel said, 'How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.' And the LORD said, 'Take a heifer with you, and say, "I have come to sacrifice to the LORD."

³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.'

⁴ Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, 'Do you come peaceably?' ⁵ He said, 'Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.' And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, 'Surely the LORD's anointed is now before the LORD.'

⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.'

⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, 'Neither has the LORD chosen this one.'

⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, 'Neither has the LORD chosen this one.'

¹⁰ Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, 'The LORD has not chosen any of these.'
¹¹ Samuel said to Jesse, 'Are all your sons here?' And he said, 'There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.' And Samuel said to Jesse, 'Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.'

¹² He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, 'Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.'

¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and

the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

SERMON: *Parenting a Revolution*

Never alone. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are *with* me.” Remember, you’re never alone.

Imagine what a revolutionary thing it could be if our children got that. If they got it that all the things that make them different does not mean they are alone. They are not alone in those moments of fear or isolation or disappointment. They are not alone in their desire to change the world.

Imagine how revolutionary it would be for the world if our children grew up convinced that they were not alone and that, no matter what, goodness and mercy follow them all the days of their lives.

I love that old Psalm 23. We will be talking more about it later this summer. But for now, I’ll say that I think we underestimate the revolutionary nature of that psalm. Maybe it’s been used too many times at funerals.

I think the psalm comes out of this story Bob read for us from I Samuel. I say that because this psalm is ascribed to David. And when Samuel comes to Jesse’s house looking for a new king of Israel, all the older sons pass by. But God says: “Nope; you are looking at the outward appearance and I look at the heart.” And so Samuel asks Jesse: “Are all your sons here?”

“There is one more,” he says, “the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.”

“The Lord is my shepherd,” Psalm 23 says.

And so the story says that they run and fetch David from the green pastures by the cool waters. And when David arrives, God says to Samuel: “Arise and anoint him, for this is the one.”
“You anoint my head with oil,” David writes.

Here’s the thing. When Samuel anoints David as king, Israel already *has* a king. That’s Saul.

To anoint David is nothing less than an act of revolution. And it’s no wonder that later in his life David went from the green pastures and cool waters to making an acquaintance with the valley of the shadow of death. He was a revolutionary. There was a price on his head.

So when we read this beautiful psalm as something comforting, just remember that the backstory is about saying yes to a revolution.

Now there’s a lot about this story that might make us ponder what kind of revolution this might be.

I should point out at the start that in this story, parenting itself – and who is doing the parenting – is complicated.

Hannah is Samuel’s birth mother but she sends him off to be raised by Eli. Eli is already a father but his own sons are a mess. Samuel is raised by Eli to be the next leader of the nation and, at the people’s demand, he anoints Saul as king and Samuel becomes a kind of spiritual father to Saul.

That’s pretty much where we pick up the story this morning.

To state the obvious, there is a complex web of parenting in the story. And that’s important because it is a reminder to us that whatever lame story we have been told about what it means to be a biblical family, the truth is, this seminal story in the Hebrew Bible is about all kinds of

people in all kinds of relationships taking responsibility for raising children.

I learned a long time ago that just because Patrick and I do not have children that does not mean that we do not have some responsibility for parenting the next generation.

The second thing is that all these different parents seem to be part of a revolution. From Hannah's prayer about lifting up the lowly, to Eli's training, to Samuel's act of anointing someone else to be king when Israel already has one, all the parenting going on seems to be in the service of raising up children to change the world.

And, beloved, if the world is telling us anything, it is that it's time for some kind of revolution – some kind of change.

And that won't be easy.

In the story, Samuel grieves over Saul. He grieved for him, the story says, until the day Saul died.

Any maybe there is some grief we need to acknowledge in our lives about things not turning out how we hoped; about the way our lives have negatively impacted the lives of our children; about the world we are leaving behind.

Samuel grieved over Saul. Maybe a good revolution begins not just with anger but with our grief about the way the world is.

And then the story says something odd: "And God was sorry that God had made Saul king over Israel."

That's pretty theologically challenging if you have been taught that will of God is something set in stone. That the way things are is the way God wants them to be. A lot of times when people talk about the "will of

God” it seems like they are just blessing the status quo – which, coincidentally, happens to benefit them. History is clear that racism and heterosexism and patriarchy have been justified as “the will of God.” But what if God is sorry for the way things are? What if God, according to this story, is setting in motion something revolutionary?

God says to Samuel: “Look, I know you are grieving over your son Saul but it’s time to get up and go do something; take your anointing oil and go anoint another king.”

In the middle of our own grief - and anticipating the grief that may come when things *do* change and we experience a loss of some of those familiar things that we settled for - parenting for a revolution means grieving *and* getting up to support that vision for a new way of life together.

And then Samuel faces the next challenge. Seven of Jesse’s older sons pass by and none of them is the one. God says: “Humans judge people’s present and future based on outward appearance but God looks at the heart.”

By the way, do you know how Saul became king?

He was tall. The people looked around and saw the tallest guy in the crowd and said: “Ok, that’s him.”

Samuel knew that didn’t work out so well.

So, if humans look at the outward appearance and God looks at the heart, you might wonder why the story goes ahead and tells us that David was “ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome?”

Maybe it’s because *God* may look at the heart but *we* don’t. Even when we know better.

Think about how much energy and attention goes into appearance – our own appearance and the appearance of others. Of course we should care for our bodies and about the way we project ourselves in the world that impacts other people.

But imagine how revolutionary it would be for us and for our children and for the world if we could be freed from some part of our distraction by appearances.

We all know that “looks can be deceiving” and yet we keep defaulting to appearances.

If Samuel was going to parent a revolution he had to keep learning the practice – the discipline really – of looking beyond the outside to that which is inside.

Not allowing ourselves to be blinded by the superficial or the surface and learning to get to the heart of things may be the most revolutionary act of all.

And above all, taking a page out of last Sunday, the people in this complex web of parenting are people who show up – regardless of grieving and a sense of loss; despite appearances; in spite of their own sense of being alone. They show up.

I remember reading about why the great Anne Lamott makes her son, Sam, show up for church. Her church is a little, struggling, multicultural, Presbyterian church in the Bay Area.

You might think, she writes, noting the bitterness ... that he was being made to sit through a six-hour Latin mass. Or you might wonder why I make this strapping, exuberant boy come with me most weeks ...

The main reason is that I want to give him what I found in the world, which is to say a path and a little light to see by. Most of the people I know who have what I want – which is to say, purpose, heart, balance,

gratitude, joy – are people with a deep sense of spirituality. They are people in community, who pray, or practice their faith; they are Buddhists, Jews, Christians – people banding together to work on themselves and for human rights. They follow a brighter light than the glimmer of their own candle; they are part of something beautiful. I saw something once from the Jewish Theological Seminary that said, “A human life is like a single letter of the alphabet. It can be meaningless. Or it can be a part of a great meaning.”

Our funky little church is filled with people who are working for peace and freedom, who are out there on the streets and inside praying ... they are home writing letters, and they are in the shelters with giant platters of food.

Anne Lamott is teaching her son to show up because there is something revolutionary in knowing that he is not alone. “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, because you are with me.”

Anne Lamott is teaching her son to show up because there is a revolution going and she wants to teach him how to be part of it. “You anoint my head with oil.”

Anne Lamott is teaching her son to show up because, despite appearances, there is something revolutionary in knowing that goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives.

She is teaching Sam to show up because she is parenting a revolution.

But that revolution will take more than Anne. It will take that complex web of relationships that is taking some responsibility for raising children to change the world. It takes you. And it takes me.

It won't be easy. So all I can say is: Heaven help us. Heaven help us all.

Notes

Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies* (Pantheon Books, 1999), pp.99-105.