

## Pastor Roy's sermon from June 14, 2015

June 14, 2015: I Samuel 16:1-13, Ezekiel 17:22-24, Mark 4:26-34

Evelyn Underwood commented during a time of church crisis that “God is the interesting thing about religion, and people are hungry for God.” She added, “Only those soaked in prayer, sacrifice, and love can help us to [find] God.”

We listen to Ezekiel praying God's response, “I bring low the high tree, I make high the low tree. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I the Lord have spoken; I will accomplish it.” Does God bring random chaos? Or does judgment simply not always come down in ways we expect or wish? Rather than the mighty, powerful, and famous, God's preference has always been for the simple, for the poor. We see this in the Bible. The Saints echo it through time. In Evelyn Underwood's words, those “soaked in prayer, sacrifice, and love.” That is a good working Biblical definition of the poor in spirit. They are not relying on themselves. They wait in their thoughts and actions on God. The goodness of life at work in this world.

The alternate reading for today is from 2 Samuel. Saul has been rejected as king of Israel. Over and over Saul would become fearful and react. He would go with God's ways if they made sense to him. If not, he did his own thing. His own thing inevitably went wrong. Then he would seek God's mercy and blessing as an afterthought. The prophet Samuel tells Saul that his kingship has been revoked. He is fired.

So the Spirit tells Samuel to go to Jesse of Bethlehem to anoint the next king. After complaining that that was a very dangerous action for him to take, he goes and anoints David, the youngest, the least likely son of an unlikely family to be king. We can almost hear his brothers walking away talking among themselves how each should have been chosen instead, perhaps similar to the disciples quibbling among themselves over who is greatest. God speaks within Samuel, “Humans look at the outward appearance, I look at the heart.” David will be fine.

David was a ? Yes, he was accustomed to being out in the field with the sheep. He cared about the sheep. Nothing would get his sheep if he had anything to do with it. So David knew prayer, sacrifice, and love. He was steeped in these. His troubles later in life came when he forgot that his goal was loyal service to his people. He was at home poolside with a drink in his hand while his men were out in battle extending and securing his borders. In his boredom, his eyes and heart wondered, bringing adultery with the wife of one of his most loyal, valiant captains, then murder when Uriah in further loyalty refused the pleasure while his men were still in battle which his king had already accepted as a right.

Sacrifice had come to be far from David's mind. We can assume prayer and true worship had dried up, too. I believe David came back around to wisdom. He realized the folly of his actions and set himself back to prayer, sacrifice, and love. But David died a fairly broken man. Where God is forgiving and merciful, consequences are often much less so. Yet, God draws near to those who pray and are willing to sacrifice in love, even if the heart of wisdom is a broken heart indeed.

So when you feel alone and you pray, you are not alone. When you feel the call to sacrifice, you are making room for God to be known to you and to others. And when you love, even when no one seems to notice, you are making God plain and knowable in this world.

Prayer, sacrifice, and love are the seed we sow on the ground of our lives. We try to make plans. We try to organize and make good things happen personally and in our congregations. The gospel lesson today is that God is faithful to bring the harvest, we know not how. We are called not to bring the harvest, but to live our faith in prayer, sacrifice, and love, following the example of Christ. Then comes a harvest of goodness and joy. It is not of our doing.

How do you sowing seeds in your life of prayer? . . .in your willingness to sacrifice? . . .in your loyal loving? Whatever you are doing, keep doing it. The seeds are being sown. God's word is true, dependable, faithful. The Spirit of God is at work! This is the stuff of faith. Thanks be to God.