

## *Doing and Being*

*For the children:*

I want to let you in on a secret, it's probably the most important secret you'll ever hear. (*whispering*)

Shhh. Listen. Shhh. Listen.

The secret isn't one to not tell, it's just that we don't always remember it.

Shhh. Listen.

Can you hear yourself breathing? Can you hear your heart beating? Maybe hold your breath and see if you can hear your heart.

Here is the secret: You don't have to think about breathing. And you don't have to tell your heart to beat. It does it because that's how God made you. And God made you that way because God loves you.

Shhh. Listen. Whenever you hear that sound, the sound of your breath or the sound of your heart, I want you to know it means God loves you.

It's also true when you can't hear that sound, but whenever you stop to listen, you will know the most important secret there is to know.

Let's pray:

*Dear Jesus, thank you for loving us. Thank you for making our hearts beat. Teach us to stop and listen for signs of your love all around us. Amen.*

Then Samuel went to Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah. Samuel never saw Saul again before he died, but he grieved over Saul. However, the Lord regretted making Saul king over Israel.

The Lord said to Samuel, "How long are you going to grieve over Saul? I have rejected him as king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and get going. I'm sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem because I have found my next king among his sons." "How can I do that?" Samuel asked. "When Saul hears of it he'll kill me!"

"Take a heifer with you," the Lord replied, "and say, 'I have come to make a sacrifice to the Lord.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will make clear to you what you should do. You will anoint for me the person I point out to you." Samuel did what the Lord instructed. When he came to Bethlehem, the city elders came to meet him. They were shaking with fear. "Do you come in peace?" they asked. "Yes," Samuel answered. "I've come to make a sacrifice to the Lord. Now make yourselves holy, then come with me to the sacrifice." Samuel made Jesse and his sons holy and invited them to the sacrifice as well.

When they arrived, Samuel looked at Eliab and thought, That must be the Lord's anointed right in front. But the Lord said to Samuel, "Have no regard for his appearance or stature, because I haven't selected him. God doesn't look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the Lord sees into the heart." Next Jesse called for Abinadab, who presented himself to Samuel, but he said, "The Lord hasn't chosen this one either." So Jesse presented Shammah, but Samuel said, "No, the Lord hasn't chosen this one." Jesse presented seven of his sons to Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord hasn't picked any of these." Then Samuel asked Jesse, "Is that all of your

boys?" "There is still the youngest one," Jesse answered, "but he's out keeping the sheep." "Send for him," Samuel told Jesse, "because we can't proceed until he gets here."

So Jesse sent and brought him in. He was reddish brown, had beautiful eyes, and was good-looking. The Lord said, "That's the one. Go anoint him." So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him right there in front of his brothers. The Lord's spirit came over David from that point forward. Then Samuel left and went to Ramah.

1 Sam. 15:34 – 16:13 (C.E.B.)

*For the adults:*

We often refer to "the Messiah" as if there is only one Messiah, as if Jesus is the only person who can fulfill the role the prophets envisioned. We forget that *messiah* is a Hebrew word meaning "anointed." We also forget that in one place Isaiah refers to the Persian ruler, King Cyrus, as the Messiah (Is. 45:1)!

In other words, God anoints different people at different times, and often for different purposes. When God anoints someone, it is both a call to be and to do.

In 1985, when I was ordained, it was like being anointed. I was being commissioned to do the work of a pastor. Following our tradition, it was a Bishop Mel Talbert who placed his hands on my head and asked God's blessings on me. Afterward, he gave me a charge to go and to do.

In a similar way, I believe our baptism is both a call to be and to do. In the act of baptism, we are set apart as different from others around us. We become God's children. It is who we are, a call to be. But it also comes with a calling to do, to respond, to live out our faith.

In our text today, David is anointed. He is set apart. He is chosen by God to become the king, the Messiah. But he will not inherit the role of King until some time later.

In our scripture for today, that story is recounted so we remember both why God chose him and as a reminder of what it means to be chosen by God.

I must confess, though, I cannot read this story without remembering another story, one I read when I was in the third or fourth grade. It not only influences the way I read this particular passage in 1 Samuel, it also affects the way I see the world.

I no longer remember the name of the story. I cannot remember all the dialogue. But I remember what the story was about as clearly as if I had read it yesterday.

The story takes place in Spain around 1491. Christopher Columbus is gathering volunteers for his now-famous journey to the new world. He goes from village to village seeking able-bodied sailors and adventurous explorers. He has three ships going, remember? And each needs a full crew.

In every village, he encounters a troupe of young boys who want to join him. For many, their parents won't give them permission. But it doesn't matter for most of them because they don't have the particular qualities Columbus is looking for.

Then he comes to a village and has dinner with a family he has known for some time. Columbus makes it clear his crew isn't complete, but he doesn't tell them what position needs to be filled.

All afternoon, the children of the family come to Columbus, one by one. Each explains why they should be on his ship when it sets sail. One boy spoke of his agility at climbing the masts and keeping the look out. Another spoke of his knowledge of knots and his ability to maintain the ropes. And yet another spoke of his willingness to work the sails, showing him examples of his amazing sewing abilities.

But Columbus isn't impressed. There are boys all along the coast of Spain who can do those things, he says. And so, one by one, each is turned down.

Finally, after several hours of visiting, Columbus asks about the youngest son.

His father sheepishly introduces Merced to Columbus and explains that he isn't very good at climbing ropes or at tying knots; and that he isn't very interested in adventures. He's what we might call a homebody. In fact, he had spent the entire afternoon with his back to Columbus! He was there all along, turning the spit on the fireplace so the meal would be cooked when supper time came.

To everyone's amazement, this was exactly the kind of person that Christopher Columbus was looking for!

He needed someone to turn the hourglass, every hour, on the hour. It was the only way to keep track of time when you are crossing time zones. Without an accurate sense of time, there could be no accurate navigation and no way to chart his travels. He was looking for someone who would not be distracted by the affairs around him, someone who could keep to the task at hand. Merced had proven himself reliable by *not* making a case for himself while his brothers paraded before Columbus.

And so it was that Merced became the shipmate of Christopher Columbus and sailed with him in 1492.

That story has often reminded me that no matter what task I have been given, it is mine to do and no one else. I must do the best I can at the task assigned and not allow myself to become distracted. The rewards for such dedicated work are not always obvious, but sometimes they can be great.

As a pastor, that often showed up when I would reflect on our purpose before helping make decisions. Keeping in mind who we are as a congregation helps us keep our focus on what we are doing.

As individuals, we know we are children of God. We know we are loved. And it's because we know whose we are, that we do what we do.

Merced's story also affects the way I read the story of David.

David was out keeping the sheep when the prophet Samuel comes for a special sacrifice (1 Sam. 16:5, 11). Everyone gathers around. All of David's brothers stop their work to join in the festivities. But David knows someone has to watch over the sheep, and since that was his task, he does it faithfully, the same way Merced did.

Samuel, too, is just doing what he is told to do. He is faithful in his assignment from God (1 Sam. 16:1). He comes to Bethlehem and prepares for a sacrifice at the home of Jesse. Unbeknownst to the rest of the family, however, Samuel also comes to anoint a king, a new king to replace Saul (1 Sam. 16:1). He carefully listens for God's guidance and direction and finds none of Jesse's sons fit God's criteria.

Rather than question God, however, Samuel begins by questioning Jesse, the host (1 Sam. 16:11). Has he done *his* assigned task and brought his entire family?

As it turns out, God is looking for a shepherd of Israel, one who will care for the Hebrew people with the kind of tenderness God has for them, the kind of tenderness a dedicated shepherd has for his sheep.

And so David becomes the anointed one.

The story does not end here, as you know. It is a long time before the rest of Israel recognizes him as King, but from this moment on, it's clear that David is God's anointed one, the Messiah.

At this point, however, he is only called to be. He is not called to do anything.

Some of you were at Camp Mennosciah to hear my first sermon at Hope. And a few of you may remember parts of that sermon, I said that in my years of active pastoral ministry, "I often told people to remember that we are human beings, not human doings. Our worth is not tied up in what we can show for our efforts; rather our worth is found when we realize that God loves us."<sup>1</sup>

In retirement, I was learning to walk the talk, to actually learn to be, without doing. And of course, I am fond of saying I failed retirement when I said yes to coming here.

The truth is I started "doing" again – with you, among you – in response to an urgent call. And it has been good. And it was needed. And my assigned task is complete, so it is also time for me to go back to simply being the person God has called me to be, without concern for what I am currently being called to do. To re-enter retirement with confidence.

Like David, I am still anointed. Like David, I find myself resting in the knowledge that I am a child of God, chosen by God, anointed by God, but not currently called to do anything but rest.

But again, I was surprised when I recognized myself in this story. You see, I am more like Samuel than David. And this week, I realized that Samuel also failed retirement! (I guess I'm in pretty good company.) You may not remember, but Samuel essentially retired when he anointed King Saul (1 Sam. 12:1-25). He made his final pitch to the people and faded away – until God called him to anoint David. He does what he is called to do and re-enters retirement, making a brief appearance later, where he helps David hide from Saul (1 Sam. 19:18-24).

From Samuel, I am learning to trust God to lead me in retirement as I focus on being rather than doing, while also keeping my ear open to what else God may call me to do.

Of course, I know I can say no. And whenever I think about saying no to God, I remember the story of Loddie Bird. She was a delight to know, and I was sad when she died at 105 years old. In preparing for her funeral, I heard lots of stories I had not known, including one her friends told me.

Apparently, when she was 92, Loddie had surgery. She didn't know for sure if she would survive, but she was OK either way. When she came out of surgery, one of her friends told her, "Well, it looks like God has something else in mind for you." To which Loddie immediately replied, "I got news for God. I ain't doing it!"

I can attest that she learned to be. But I also know she continued to find ways to do, as well.

The story of Merced, the story of David, the story of Samuel, for that matter, is a reminder to us all that we have each been called to be and to do. We have been loved by God, called to be God's children, and anointed to serve. And each of us has a role to play within the body of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Direct quote from my "Sabbath Rest" sermon.

Samuel learned to come out of retirement when called.  
David learned to wait for the right time to ascend the throne.  
Merced learned to be faithful to the task at hand.

Jesse learned the importance of doing what we are asked to do.  
I like to think Loddie did, too.  
I know I have.

Each of us has an important place within the church, within the Kingdom of God. It is our common purpose to identify God's will and to seek to be faithful to God's desires for each of us. Sometimes we are called to specific tasks. Sometimes we are called to what might seem like menial tasks. Sometimes we are called to simply be.

If we begin by remembering we are loved, if we continue learning to be still and listen, we can be assured God will find ways to work through us.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

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