



Sermons from First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor

“Picked Last”

The Rev. Jim Monnett

June 14, 2009

The Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.” 16:11c

Do you remember summer days down by the circle? Kickball. Nothing better than kickball. We’ve rounded up enough people, we’ve got a crowd this day. All crowded up. Doug and Steve, the two new seventh graders, are captains. And they’re going to pick.

“Chris.” That’s a good pick, Chris can always catch those line drive kicks.

“Ellen.” Good, she’s a leg on her.

“John.” Doug always picks my brother, they’re good friends.

Down the crowd they go. Are you sweating? How’s your heart rate? This is looking bad ... again. Again!

Now it’s down to just the two of us.

“I’ll take Miller, you get Monnett.”

Picked last...again.

Helen and Ben were two members of my first church, First Presbyterian Church, Mt. Vernon, Indiana. They were in their mid-70s. I visited with them once a month. Ben loved to tell stories, so you better clear your schedule for pastoral visits. He was a long-time line worker for Chrysler out in St. Louis before retiring to Mt. Vernon. Helen had great ideas, and a deep, deep love for God which she expressed in kindness for others. At the same time, living with Ben, she had learned to stand up for herself. Ben was a bit stubborn ... had a few opinions ... about most things. She stood up for herself. She had to.

I suggested Helen to the nominating committee for the Session. Soon she was ordained and installed.

Did you hear that? Seventy years of church membership and never called to be an elder. At a session meeting during a sharing time, she expressed how shocked and ... HONORED ... she was when the nominating committee had called and asked her to stand for election as an elder of the church. She never thought it would happen. She hoped she could live up to the honor. She became a terrific elder.

Picked last.

King Saul has disobeyed the Lord. And when questioned about it by the prophet Samuel instead of confessing it and repenting this sin, he denies it ... then says he sinned in God’s honor. You can

imagine how well that goes with God's prophet. When we sin, we don't say we do it for God. "I lied for you, God." "I stole for you, God." "I gossiped for you, God."

Then, probably seeing the look on Samuel's face, King Saul finally says, "I have sinned." He finally speaks those so important words. And they're hard to say. Aren't they? It's hard to admit when we are wrong: especially hard to admit it to the prophet – the one who speaks for God. But this is too little too late. Now I know God forgives all sin, so Saul is forgiven, but his sin and failures and denials has led Samuel to declare:

"You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!"
Ouch.

This is all found in chapter 15.

Now Samuel takes his leave, but he is grieving. Now we pick up the story in 1 Samuel 16. Listen to it from *The Message*:

"1 God addressed Samuel: "So, how long are you going to mope over Saul? You know I've rejected him as king over Israel. Fill your flask with anointing oil and get going. I'm sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I've spotted the very king I want among his sons."

God has picked up a new king. And He will come out a Bethlehem. Familiar.

So Samuel goes to Bethlehem, not without a bit of fear for Saul. Kings don't like new kings. We don't know what Samuel tells Jesse, but some service is going on and Samuel is picking from Jesse's sons.

Jesse probably knows something great is about to happen. So let's get the whole family together and see who the prophet of the Most High picks ... all seven sons.

None of them are the one God has chosen.

Not one.

Can you image being the unnamed seventh son waiting and watching your brothers go before the Prophet. Eliab. No. Abinadab. No. Shammah. "Nor has the Lord chosen this one." Then the remaining four sons pass. Each son getting more excited. Is it me, Lord?

Is it me, Lord? Did you call me? None.

The Lord has not chosen these. Are these all the sons you have?

Back to *The Message*, "Well, yes, there's the runt. But he's out tending the sheep."

A bit like the Prodigal Son, the party's going on, but where's the faithful one? Out tending the sheep. Where is the one God has called? The one who will be the shepherd of God's people?

Where is Helen when a leader is needed? She is in the church kitchen doing our dishes. She's down at the Food Pantry feeding the poor. She's on her street making a dish to share with old Mrs. Henry whose husband is sick. She's sitting in the sanctuary...just praying.

So they brought David to see Samuel.

Then the Lord said, "Rise and anoint him, he is the one."

You take Helen, I'll take David. Picked last. Amen.