

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

1 Samuel 16:1-13

^{16:1} 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.

Commentary

After his anointing by Samuel, David is mentioned as a lyre-player at the court of King Saul, ruler of an area north and east of Jerusalem (then called Jebus). David left his court to become a warlord to the south, in the Bethlehem area. Saul has enjoyed God's favor, but has lost it by disobeying the prophet Samuel's instructions. God now orders Samuel, his agent, to anoint a new king, a son of "Jesse". Samuel's route to Bethlehem is through Saul's territory, so he asks God how he is to make the trip (v. 2). God tells him to say that he comes to "sacrifice to the Lord": this is part of his purpose. "Eliab" (v. 6) is Jesse's eldest son. Surely a tall first-born is God's choice for king (vv. 6-7). But God's choice is not humankind's choice. (Jesse's second and third sons are "Abinadab", v. 8, and "Shammah", v. 9). David's complexion is "ruddy" (v. 12); he is God's choice. When Samuel anoints him (with olive oil), the "spirit of the Lord" (v. 13) comes upon him. His brothers are witnesses. Samuel returns to "Ramah", his seat of judgment. Saul persecutes David relentlessly but upon Saul's death in battle, David unifies the north and the south and ascends to the throne.

Reflection

The story of the anointing of the young shepherd-boy David is revealing of God's *modus operandi* throughout the Bible: God often chooses the unexpected, overlooked, under-prepared or unwilling ones for his service. Might God be calling YOU to his service?

Ephesians 5:8-14

^{5:8} For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – ⁹ for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰ Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³ but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Commentary

The author has exhorted his readers to conduct themselves ethically as befits those who have adopted the way of Christ. Having "put away your former way of life" (4:22) and being *clothed with the new self* (4:24) when they were "marked with a seal" (4:30) in baptism, they are now to lead moral lives for, being members of a body in which the Holy Spirit dwells, an offence against a member is an offence against God. They are to "share with the needy" (4:28), emphasize the good in others (4:29) and imitate "God" (5:1) and Christ. They must obey God (5:6). Now, in terminology also found at Qumran and in Matthew, the author contrasts unbelievers (who live in "darkness", 5:8, and disobey God) with those who are in "light" (5:8), "in the Lord". Christians should "expose" (5:11) deviations from God's ways. Evil deeds are known to God (5:13). 5:14b may be a quote from an early baptismal hymn. Seek the "light", what God would have you do (5:10).

Reflection

What are some ways in which we might "try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord"?

John 9:1-41

^{9:1} As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷ saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹ He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹² They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath." But others said,

"How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵ He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶ They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷ He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰ The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴ They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

Commentary

Perhaps Jesus encounters the blind man in the precincts of the Temple, where beggars habitually gathered. Illness and physical disability were attributed to sin: in this case, either of the man (prenatally) or of "his parents" (v. 2). Jesus dismisses the link between sin and illness, at least in this case; rather he says that this man's impairment provides him with opportunities to do (and show) the works of God. Jesus and his followers ("we", v. 4) must do his mission while they can. A time is coming (from his crucifixion to his resurrection) when he, "the light of the world" (v. 5) will not be in the world, so he will be unable to "work" (v. 4, and the disciples will desert him). Jesus takes earth (the substance from which *human*, Adam, was made), makes a "mud" (v. 6) poultice, and applies it to the man's eyes. If he has trust enough to go to the "pool" (v. 7) and wash it off, he will have sight. He does; thus Jesus completes one of "God's works" (v. 3). John draws attention to "Siloam" (v. 7) as meaning "Sent", thereby alluding to Jesus as *sent* for the salvation of humankind – so washing symbolizes baptism.

Despite the man's claim to be the one who was a beggar, those who know him are divided: some say "it is he" (v. 9) but others doubt: he only looks like the beggar. In vv. 10-22, the man confirms his cure as genuine. The Pharisees consider making mud on the Sabbath as breaking the Law (v. 14) so they examine the man. They too are divided (v. 16): between those who say Jesus can't be from God (for he breaks the Law) and those who wonder how a Sabbath-breaker can perform miracles (which only one

approved by God can do). So they question the man further, hoping that the dilemma can be resolved by discrediting the cure (v. 17). They ask: *What do you say about his opening of your eyes?* He insists that Jesus' power is from God ("a prophet"). The man's parents swear that their son was blind from birth but say no more, for fear of being cast out of the community (vv. 18-23). The Pharisees invite the man to confess that he has deceived them in claiming to be cured (v. 24). ("Give glory to God" is an Old Testament formula inviting confession.) The man boldly asserts the fact of the cure and adds, ironically: *if you listen to my story you may admit that Jesus is right!* (v. 27) They question Jesus' authority: "we know" (v. 29) that the Law is from God, but Jesus is an upstart! The man ridicules their *expert* opinion (v. 30). God only listens to sinners who are penitent (v. 31). Jesus must be "from God" (v. 33) for no one has ever before performed such a cure (v. 32). For trying to teach the Pharisees a lesson, the man is evicted from the synagogue ("drove him out", v. 34). Jesus invites him to express his faith shown by his conduct (vv. 35-38). He says he took on human form for two purposes: to give understanding, sight, of ultimate reality, and to punish those who think they "see" (v. 39) but don't. The Pharisees are incredulous (v. 40). Jesus says: if you were ignorant of God's ways ("blind", v. 41) you would be considered sin--less, but you make the unfounded assumption that you do "see", so you are liable to be punished.

Reflection

Where do you feel the movement of the Spirit in this passage? Do you identify more with the blind man, or with the Pharisees? Has God ever healed your spiritual blindness? If so, how?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 23

23:1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
2 **He makes me lie down in green pastures;**
He leads me beside still waters;
3 He restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.
4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.
5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.

Closing Prayer

Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.