

Meadowbrook Congregational Church

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“Challenging Assumptions”

Rev. Arthur P. Ritter

I Samuel 16: 1-13

16The 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.

A friend of mine was telling me about her struggles getting her youngest child out of his crib and into a regular bed. Perhaps there are some parents out there who can associate with this particular adventure! I know it brings back some rather unpleasant memories in my mind. The boy’s new bedroom has a NASCAR theme with the bed itself shaped like a racecar. The wallpaper is full of brightly colored cars. His name printed on a car hangs on the door. All things a little boy should love, right?

Well, maybe. The first night that the boy was supposed to sleep in the “big bed” he cried and cried. His parents finally let him sleep in the crib in the nursery. A few nights later they rocked him to sleep and then carefully placed him in the racecar bed. They awoke in the middle of the night to find that the boy had somehow crawled back into the crib. The parents then removed the crib from the nursery. Dad tried falling asleep with the boy on the racecar bed. After a couple of hours Dad awoke

alone, to discover that the boy was in bed with Mom. After a few weeks of frustration, my friend told me that she had found something that had finally worked. They set up the racecar bed in the nursery. The little boy seems quite content in his new bed, as long as it is in the old familiar spot.

In a couple of weeks, I will embark upon a difficult task. I shall attempt to teach my 19 year old daughter how to drive a car with a stick shift. If she wants to drive a car this summer, she will have to learn how. Maren has already dropped hints that she is not real comfortable with a stick shift. She has asked me about how I would feel if she caused an accident or ruined the car. She has reminded me that her old car in Utah, which we sold before moving, was an automatic. She called me the other day to offer me her insight to the fact that we really need three cars this summer and perhaps the new car that we are going to buy (which by the way I don't have any money to buy) will be an automatic and that I would be wasting my time teaching her to drive a stick shift. I am aware that she is more comfortable with the kind of car in which she learned to drive and is a little uneasy about anything with a clutch. But I believe that once she challenges the stick shift, she will find it easier than she believes.

The Scripture lesson this morning is a wonderful story about the anointing of David as the future King of Israel. Saul, the reigning king, had fallen into disfavor with God because he had failed to follow God's direction in battle. So God sent Samuel, the judge and spiritual leader of Israel, in search of a new leader. Samuel went to Bethlehem, a place that we know quite well from another story

later in the Bible. There he was told to anoint one of Jesse's sons as the future king.

The sons came out, one at a time. It was like an audition for a part in a high school play. The first was Eliab, strong and tall and handsome. Samuel was certain he was the one. But God said, "Pay no attention to his good looks." Another brother came out, then another, and another. In all seven sons of Jesse paraded before Samuel. Each seemed capable of being king. Each was rejected by God. Finally in desperation, the young David was brought before Samuel. "This is the one," God says. "Anoint him as King of Israel." And Samuel did as God asked him to do.

At first reading, we might find ourselves linked with little David. He is the underdog. He is at first glance, nothing special. But he is chosen by God. We like to think that God does not judge by outward appearance but by the heart. With that divine logic, we too can be chosen for something special in our very next breath.

But when I read over this story, I prefer to compare myself to Samuel, the one who had to anoint the future of God's Kingdom. Samuel was the one who actually had to act upon God's vision and call. Did you notice how reluctant he was to do it? "How can I do that? If King Saul hears that I am running around looking for a new king, he will kill me!" There were risks for Samuel in following God's intention. What God desired of him was at odds with the human assumptions of power and authority. What God wanted him to do meant something had to be challenged,

something had to change, and something had to be made new.

David was chosen by God to be anointed king. But Saul was still very much alive and very much in power. What was Samuel to do? There are always risks in challenging the assumptions of our world. It is always an adventure when we anoint something as God's in a world and a time in which darkness and evil claim authority. We are confronted with the pressure to conform. We are lured by what the world promotes as beautiful, important, powerful and successful. We view others and our world situation through prejudices we have been taught or we have inherited from others. We may look for ways to compromise, to blend in when God has called us to stand out. We may procrastinate, hoping God might change the divine plan to better suit our comfort level and our needs.

Samuel's situation reminds me that there are clearly two different orders involved in the life of faith. There is still darkness and death and hate and prejudice and violence and power and suspicion. But God has acted, as in the Easter event itself, to bring a new order that challenges old assumptions and empowers faith and trust for those who would dare to live differently and anoint new ways of living that promote light and life, peace and understanding, justice and righteousness, mercy and compassion.

There is a story about a good mother duck who for years led her ducklings to the same pond. One year, the pond was drained by the construction of a small dam further up the stream. But the good mother duck persisted in

bringing her young to the same place where now even the mud was baked dry by the sun. She walked around, flapping her wings and quacking, trying to induce the youngsters to enter a pond that was no longer there. The ducklings, with fresh instincts, heard the far off drippings of the new dam. They smelled the chickweed and the new grass growing beside the dam. They absolutely refused to walk around baked mud and pretend to look for worms in a place where no worms existed. They left their mother quacking beside her ancient pond and set out for fresher pasture. They were willing to challenge the existing assumptions and risk action in the promise of a new world.

We are people who live between the dawning of a new order in Jesus the Christ and its full coming to light as God intends for it to be. Although God has called us to anoint this new age, we are sometimes still reluctant to cast our lot with its newness. Like the mother duck, the assumptions of the old are still comfortable, powerful, and attractive. Like it did the prophet Samuel, the old demands our loyalty and tries to discourage us from stepping out in faith. In this season of Easter, we are presented with the new thing that God has done in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Believing in the resurrection and living a new life is a venture of faith, a challenge of assumptions the world holds near and dear. But God's future awaits in our future. We are called to anoint with each word and action.