

Pent 2B (proper 6) sermon 061409
1 Samuel 15:34-16:13; Psalm 20
2 Corinthians 5:6-10, (11-13), 14-17
Mark 4:26-34

In the name of God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit, Amen

I've said before that one of my favorite movies is Paul Haggis' 2005 exploration of race relations in America, "*Crash*." One of the recurring themes of *Crash* is that people are not what other people see. Over and over in the film, people's prejudices induce them to make assumptions about others that turn out to be completely untrue.

In one scene, a wealthy white woman has called to have the locks in her home changed after she and her husband are carjacked. When the locksmith shows up, the woman tells her husband that he needs to call another locksmith in the morning to get the locks changed again, because she is sure that this "gangbanger" is going to sell their keys to someone in his barrio. She makes this pronouncement because the locksmith is Hispanic, has his hair closely cropped, and wears a white t-shirt and khaki pants. As the audience finds out later in the film, the locksmith is a hard working husband and father, who is honest to a fault and whose biggest desire in life is for his daughter to grow up out of the barrio – healthy, happy and well educated.

Crash is such a great film because it speaks of universal truth – that we *all* have our prejudices. But the most striking thing about the movie is that it zeros in on "first impression prejudices." We all see people and instantly judge them, based solely upon how they look. We see someone who is dirty, wearing shabby clothing and pushing a shopping cart full of cans. We "*know*" that the person is homeless. But we also "*know*" that this person we have already judged to be homeless is also uneducated, likely criminal and almost undoubtedly mentally ill. That's a lot of assumptions for a brief glance – but admit it, you've done it.

In this morning's reading from 1st Samuel, we see the same human failing on display. The prophet Samuel is called by God to go and anoint one of Jesse's sons to become the next king of Israel. This reading is about Samuel's prejudgment and what a mistake God saw it to be.

In the early part of chapter fifteen – which precedes this morning's reading – King Saul got “fired” from his position as ruler; by God no less. Through Samuel, God had given Saul strict orders regarding a battle that Israel was to fight against the Amalekites and Saul ignored part of God's instructions. God then told the prophet Samuel that God regretted making Saul king in the first place. So Samuel sent his friend Saul into retirement and went to Bethlehem, on God's orders, to anoint a new king. Now think about that for a moment. Saul was the **King** of Israel – ostensibly the most powerful person in the country; able to determine who has life and who has death – and he takes his orders, including the order to leave – from Samuel, the prophet.

The stories of Samuel's prophecies and Saul's kingship show the depth and breadth of Samuel's relationship with God. Samuel was able to communicate with God in a very effective manner. God spoke and Samuel understood.

When Samuel went in to the house that God led him to, Jesse brought his sons in. The instant Samuel saw the eldest son, he judged that Eliab was the one who had been chosen by God to be the new king. Eliab was tall and handsome; the sort of young man who commands a room by the power of his presence. And Samuel had the most common of all prejudices – that tall and handsome people are the best people. Eliab came into the room and Samuel said, “of course this is the guy. He's tall, commanding, handsome; what else could God possibly want.” But God told Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him;”

Then God said to Samuel, “(T)he Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” Even God's most trusted prophet, a man with whom God

had regular two-way conversations didn't see as God saw people. This tendency to judge based upon surface appearances is such a human frailty that *everyone* has to be careful in order to avoid it. And most of the time, let's face it, we don't even *try* to avoid seeing through the eyes of our own prejudices.

Samuel's story is a very instructive piece for us. We look at the outside, judge immediately and only recognize the meaningless, the surface aspects of people. God looks on the inside and sees what is important.

And it is not just in socioeconomics and race that we don't see what God sees. When people first look at Taylor, they know instantly that she is "different." Her eyes, her ears, her teeth – as well as her hands and feet – are all different than most people's. And if that weren't enough, as soon as she speaks, strangers seal their judgments about her. Because she has a profound speech delay, and her hearing is sometimes a problem, people who meet her often judge that she is stupid. Occasionally we hear people say, under their breath, "re-tard," as she walks away. People look at Taylor and make assumptions that she cannot understand them; that she is not capable of learning; that she is not capable of much. But God sees her differently.

God doesn't see what Taylor cannot do, but instead, sees what she *can* do. God sees Taylor's heart. And seeing her heart requires a wide-angle lens; because it is so huge. In Taylor, God sees love that knows no bounds, just like His own. Taylor gives love to anyone who comes into her path. You don't have to prove anything to her first, you don't have to earn her love, it radiates from her. And while Taylor's academic limitations mean that she may never be able to read beyond a rudimentary level, God sees that she *can* read people. She can read which people accept her love – and which ones don't.

Just as the shepherd boy, David was the unlikely person to be blessed by God as the successor to King Saul, Taylor is the unlikely recipient of a gift from God. She was given a gift that allows her

naturally to see as God sees. She knows love when she sees it and she knows when love is missing in someone's life. God didn't choose Taylor for this gift because she was tall or handsome or commanding. God chose Taylor based upon what was seen with godly eyes – a beautiful spirit.

St. Paul said, in his second letter to the Corinthians, "From now on, ..., we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way." Jesus was able to read human hearts, just as God did with Jesse's sons. Paul tells us that before we met Jesus, we weren't expected to see beyond the human point of view. But now, we no longer see Jesus that way, and we shouldn't look at each other that way either.

Paul says that we can no longer get away with our prejudices simply because we're human. Now that we have known Jesus, we can no longer get by with saying, "that's just the way I'm made. I call 'em like I see 'em, and I know what *"those people"* are like." St. Paul says, "(I)f anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" That new creation is *us*. Jesus died so that we could be reborn; made new and improved. Jesus saw tax collectors and prostitutes for who they really were, not for who society said they were. Jesus expects nothing less from those who know *Him*. Paul says it best, "(E)verything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

We have new eyes, given us through Christ. When we open them, we see people's hearts and we are able to reach out to them in that way. When we close our godly eyes, we simply continue to see the ignorance of our own prejudices.

Amen.