**St David’s Episcopal Church**

Bean Blossom, IN

Thirds Sunday after Pentecost, June 9, 2024

Sermon by the Rev Kate Wilson

### 1 Samuel 8:4-20, 11:14-15 Psalm 138 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1 Mark 3:20-35✠

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Good morning! I spent Friday night and Saturday in New Harmony at a day of discernment held by the diocese and organized by Jennifer Phelps. About 30 people came, which was a good showing. I was surprised to see that maybe three or four came to learn more about the process to ordained ministry, whereas the 25 or so others, many of whom were retired or within 10 years of retirement, came to determine what God might be calling them to do now, as lay people. I attended as a member of the Commission on Ministry, and because my own discernment process 20 years ago was virtually unsupported. My diocese was in process of ejecting a bishop who was causing chaos, and my rector was fixated on homosexuality and was kind of stuck there. Now, Kevin was a terrific rector, very gifted, but this little aspect of his psyche – he married during seminary because people thought he was gay – was not helpful. So for me, meetings such as this one are rich with grace and support and my own discernment of my call as a priest and as a person.

‘Nuf said about that. This morning I want to fill in some of the spaces around our reading from Samuel, because Samuel is so central in our salvation history. A boy, yet a prophet who appeared, as you remember from last week, to have a channel to God, a channel by which God advised Samuel to carry a difficult message to the High Priest, Eli. Eli’s sons, who were also temple priests, were living flagrantly in sin and that the Lord was about to smite – well, to take corrective action. One of my favorite cartoons shows a white robed, white bearded, long white-haired God sitting before his computer, with his index finger hovering over the special key on his keyboard that is marked not Enter, not Shift, but SMITE as a piano is being lifted by ropes while a man walks along the sidewalk under the weighty piano.

Again, ‘nuf said about that. Samuel has grown to be both a prophet and a judge who rules through the law over the Jews. In our reading today Samuel is now quite old, and it looks as if the next generation, his sons, will soon be taking his place. But apparently what goes around comes around, as Samuel’s sons, like Eli’s, are despised by the people. Samuel had made them judges to rule over different segments of the people, and they are well known for taking bribes, for throwing judgments to the highest bidder, for generally enriching themselves at the expense of the people, and for having no interest in the Lord or what the Lord might have in mind for them OR the people.

The people reject these lawless judges and want a warrior monarch like other nations. Samuel is opposed to anointing a king, and our reading outlines what evils a king would bring to the people. Nonetheless, the people insist on a king, and God advises Samuel to listen to the people.

As it happens, quoting from Samuel

*There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish son of Abiel son of Zeror son of Becorath son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth. 2He had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; he stood head and shoulders above everyone else.*

Saul not only had the height advantage and the looks advantage, he was also a military hero. He had amassed an army of 370,000 and saved a town that had been taken by the Ammonites. The Ammonites planned to enslave the people and, as was the custom, to knock out each person’s right eye.

Saul delivered the people from this fate and became a celebrated hero. Hooray! In fact, he became the king anointed by Samuel, and, in doing so, he united the two kingdoms of Judea and Israel into a single nation.

Later stories will bring King David, and our salvation history continues. This whole story, which I have encapsulated to connect the dots, is dramatic and compelling and very, very human, and I commend your reading all the events recounted in 1 Samuel. It puts a lot of pieces together and it makes it clear why Psalm 138 was placed in our readings for today:

*8 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe; \*
you stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies;
your right hand shall save me.*

The Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians deserves a round-table discussion in itself, and the attendees at the Discernment event yesterday seemed to have intuited this reading for today:

*So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day….For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

This is not just about what to do after retirement, it is about what to do of value and worth at every age. When I worked in a field that I thought had value to children’s education, it gave me joy. People experience joy in their work if they see value in it, value in their commitment of so many hours to something of social value, a higher good. I felt called to the work I did: different aspects of my life experiences readied me for it. Similarly, every aspect of our lives to date readies us for the next leg of our calls. Discernment of call continues throughout our lives. Again, as yesterday’s audience demonstrated.

Now, Jesus was clear on his call, wasn’t he, despite the heat he took from the scribes and the pharisees. Despite being nearly crushed to death by those who believed in him…or at the least believed in his super powers. They may or may not have stuck around to engage in his greater message, the purpose of his life and **for o**ur lives. The crowds sure wanted his miraculous or maybe magical powers. As in the days of Samuel, and the days today, people are attracted to someone who delivers for them, or they believe will deliver for them. And we don’t always look for the deeper meanings and outcomes, we don’t always try to discern if those outcomes are dark or light. I wonder how many people came for the spectacle show but left before Jesus began teaching.

Not even Jesus’s family was attuned to what he was doing and why. It appears that in today’s clip from the total Gospel, his mother and siblings believe that he has lost his mind, that, as some are saying, he is possessed by Satan. Or, at the very least, their son and brother, a regular guy in their minds, is going to be crushed to death by his frenzied followers. Bottom line: they don’t know who Jesus is. They expect him to be just like them, and they are ready to reject him unless he “straightens up” and flies right.

As you know, this month is gay pride month and today the pride parade and festival is occurring in Indy. The diocese has a large contingent of marchers, wearing the diocesan tee shirt, carrying banners with the same messages that are on the shirt, the Episcopal and American flags, and a hearty and open-hearted welcome to **all people** to our tables.

I began this morning by retelling some of the serious bumps in the road of my early discernment toward the priesthood. Of my homophobic rector, in particular, who didn’t engage at a soul level for a very long time. How we were able to move forward is grist for another sermon. How the bishop was generally pitting people against each other and was unavailable to individuals in search of Jesus. But today, let’s just say that Jesus’s experiences on the day of our Gospel have been experienced by many hopeful, hungry Christians who are walking a parade route or viewing the parade. Many people who have been formed in the image of God in ways that even their own families reject. Even their own families want them to “straighten up”. Even their own families fail to see the God light in their eyes. Even their own families are ashamed, and aren’t listening for or speaking the language of God’s love. The families think they are guided by Satan. They are people who are rejected by their rectors, their ministers, their teachers, churches, and denominations. Yesterday, quite a few people began their remarks – whether they were straight or gay – with, “I was raised as a Southern Baptist” or “I was raised as a Roman Catholic” or “I was raised as a fill-in-the-blank.” Many continued, “and my church uninvited me from their table.” And all found an open door in the Episcopal Church.

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

We are called to consider carefully and with an open heart who our brothers and sisters are. We are called to love generously all who are or are potentially our brothers and sisters. We are all called to listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit, not the voice of those who profane the Holy Spirit for the comfort of their own beliefs. We are all called to listen and to hear Jesus’s beliefs, Jesus’s rules for inclusion, Jesus’s love. This gives us all the strength to handle the bumps in our spiritual roads, to fill the potholes in our lonely souls with grace and not hate. To extend our hands and our hearts to all who may soon become our brothers and sisters. No exceptions.

Thanks be to God. ✠