



A sermon preached by Rebecca Vendetti at the Church of Saint John the Evangelist, June 17, 2018.

Series: "God at Work"

Part III: "God Sees"

Rebecca Vendetti is a member of our faith community at the Church of Saint John the Evangelist along with her husband Jacob, and their twin sons Zechariah and Elijah. Rebecca is a PhD candidate in the Religious Studies Department at McMaster University and has recently submitted her dissertation which discusses the work of C.S. Lewis and his understanding of the church's doctrine of the atonement.

"God at Work" is a sermon series following the stories of Samuel and David in the book of 1 Samuel and tracing God's gracious activities in their lives with a view to helping us grow in our ability to see God's gracious activity at work in our own lives.

On Tuesday, last week, I said "no" to a job offer. It was one of the scariest things I have ever done. And I've been in lock down in a hospital, hiding in a corner, thinking that I might die execution style. I'm not sure which was scarier, to be honest.

The job was for a youth ministry position in Toronto. And this will come back to the story of David and Samuel, I promise. It was part time, paid well, something I'm passionate about, and I have nothing else to fall back on. Totally counterintuitive, illogical, and totally frightening.

Why I said "no" basically comes down to trusting God, which is one of the central themes in our story about Samuel anointing David. I had asked God to give me a giant neon, flashing sign as to what to do next. I'm nearly done the PhD. (Yay!) I know I want to work in the church. So now what? Well, God opened the Toronto door, but I wasn't sure if I should walk through it. But why would He open the door if I'm not supposed to go there, right? Well, it turns out that sometimes God has us do things that may seem counterintuitive in order to strengthen our faith in him, and our willingness to trust him in all circumstances.

This was the case for Samuel and David. David was not the obvious choice for king. He was the youngest brother. Even his father apparently did not think him a suitable candidate, since he didn't bother calling him in from the fields until Samuel asked, "Are you sure you don't have any more sons?" Last week Beth talked about how God doesn't always act in the way that we expect, and that we are often judging (and expecting things to work out according to) worldly standards. This was the case with Samuel and David. And, in fact, it was the case for me last week as well.

My worldly standards were those of wealth, comfort, and safety. I wanted to rely on a paycheck. I would feel safe if I had employment lined up that would help to pay the bills. In fact, I have an interview coming up on the 20th for an administration job that I want more than I want the youth job, and perhaps for better reasons. My original plan was to take the second interview with the

youth job (which would have happened before the admin interview, on the 19th), to keep my options open. What if the admin job doesn't work out? I need *something*, don't I? Keeping this option open until I know about the other is safe.

I should tell you what happened after I got the sort-of offer of the youth ministry job, to clarify the story. They said they were interested. They said, "Let's meet again next week to discuss a potential youth program and show you around the church." I was excited about working with youth and advancing the Gospel, but anxious about the location. 2 evenings away from home plus Sundays. The husband works the rest of the evenings, so we'd basically never see each other. Maybe Saturdays. But there's a closer job. One that wouldn't require evening work (so I could keep volunteering with the youth group here) and one that fits around my family's schedule. But I don't have that one yet. Who in their right mind is going to step off of one boat – where it's safe – before there's another boat to step onto? And aren't I really just making excuses?

The morning after I got the sort-of offer I called a friend, who recommended that we go walk a labyrinth up on West 5th to see if God has any answers to this "which job" problem. In fact, God gave both of us the passage about the lilies in the field and not being concerned about money. "Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?... (Ouch, right?) ... And don't be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don't worry about such things. These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs." This came to both of us, separately. Coincidence?

One of my biggest reasons for taking the job in Toronto would be money. It's a good paycheck. I need a good paycheck. If I'm taking money completely out of the picture, I can do everything else that I would want out of this position by volunteering with our youth group here. But I was scared. Scared of stepping out of the boat without a life raft. Shouldn't I wait for a life raft to come by? Those waves look awfully big. And I could, really, if I just dug my heels in and did it, run the youth program in Toronto, do the administration too if they want me, and run my Navigators ministry (another big, fat stepping out in faith project). But I would be acting out of fear. I would be doing the second interview for the youth ministry job because I was afraid of not getting the admin job. And if I took the youth ministry job, it would not be because I was excited to grow a youth group (I am, but maybe not so much one an hour away) but because I was afraid of what would happen come September if I don't have a job lined up.

I would be placing my trust in circumstances, in job interviews, and in paychecks, instead of in God. And when I was talking with another friend about this in a coffeeshop, I asked why God had opened this door if I wasn't supposed to take the job. She had, wisely, suggested that perhaps my anxiety over the situation and the fact that it would decimate our family life was perhaps God closing the door. "Yeah, but...."

"Who are you trusting, in this scenario?" She asked. "God, or a paycheck."

"Definitely the paycheck. Definitely not God."

And in the resulting conversation she essentially preached my sermon (my original David and Samuel sermon that I wrote before all this happened) back to me.

And what that looked like was something like this.

What do you place your trust in? Do you *really* trust God? (My answer to this was emphatically “no”. I know that I am supposed to. And I know, theoretically, that he works all things for my good. But deep down inside me there’s something that says, “There is no way that this is all going to work out. I have to power through this and fix it on my own.” In fact, I have said, out loud, to God, “No. No, I don’t trust that you will make all this right. I don’t trust that you will provide something more fitting. I don’t trust that everything will work out. I need to do this completely under my own steam. I need *this* thing, *right* here, *right* now.” Sounds familiar, doesn’t it? Adam and Eve also did not trust God and wanted to do things their own way. They tried to determine *for themselves* what was right and what was wrong. And look how that turned out.)

Well, David *really* trusted God. We learn, in this passage from 1 Samuel, that God doesn’t see things the way we see them. “People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” And what we find in David’s heart is this:

1. He is brave. Later in the story, he kills the giant, Goliath, when everyone else is afraid to do battle with him. We also learn that, as a shepherd, he rescues lambs from the mouths of lions and bears. He is able to do this because he trusts that God is in complete control.
2. David has a truly grateful heart. Psalm 30: “I will give thanks unto thee forever”.
3. David is reliable. He keeps the sheep, which is a lonely and dirty job, but he does it because that’s what he has been assigned to do. He even places his life on the line to protect those sheep.
4. David has a truthful nature. When he sinned (a pretty massive sin involving adultery and what amounts to murder), he admitted his sin to God and was forgiven.
5. David has a transparent life. He prayed (Psalm 26:2) that God would examine his life. “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts.” (I take comfort in the fact that at least I am honest when, in my biggest moments of doubt, I say to God “Umm ... I don’t really think you’ve got this.” Transparency is better than the alternative. I mean, really, God knows what’s in our hearts anyway. I might as well be honest.)
6. David was confident in God’s power and trusted that God would see him through life’s struggles. When he offers to do battle with Goliath, he displays this confidence in God: “The Lord who rescued me from the claws of the lion and the bear will rescue me from this Philistine!” (1 Sam 17:37). David has a true and genuine faith, a faith so strong that he can approach a nine-foot giant in battle with only 5 stones and a slingshot and *trust* that God will see him through.

Imagine having this kind of faith in God, this kind of trust that God will see you through life’s challenges and that he will work all things for your good.

The fact is that God sees all of this in David. God knows David better than David knows David. God knows *you* better than you know you. When the time comes to select a new king, God doesn’t

judge by outward appearance, but rather “looks at the heart” (1 Sam 16:7). What this tells us is that the world’s standards are different than God’s standards.

We see this in the passage from 2 Corinthians today as well: “We have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view.” We, too, are not to judge things by their appearances, by the standards of the world. God and the world do not have the same perspective on life. The world values wealth, reputation, comfort, stability.... What God wants from us first and foremost is a heart that trusts Him, that follows him even when the standards of the world suggest that doing so is foolish.

We see this in God’s rejection of Eliab. According to the world’s standards, where success is measured by strength, power, wealth, and reputation, we would expect Eliab to be chosen king because of his position in the family. We learn later, though, that Eliab has a temper and he is distrustful of David (perhaps signalling a nature that is more generally distrustful). The choosing of David inverts the hierarchy of world.

The world judges according to what you have, what you do, and what people say about you. (These were the temptations that the devil used against Christ in his 40 days in the desert.) David, being the youngest, had nothing. What he did was to tend the sheep, a dirty and thankless job that came with no power or reputation, and what people said about him was, basically....well, not much. He wasn’t even considered as a choice for king. According to the standards of the world, he wasn’t even in the running. But God had other plans.

And I think that God chose David primarily because David trusted God in all circumstances. His bravery came from his belief that God would work all things for his good. He was truthful, reliable, grateful, and would follow God wherever He led him. The kind of *trust* in God that David demonstrates is amazing. How many of us would walk up to an armed giant with nothing but a slingshot and a handful of stones and say, “I trust that God’s got this.”

As we see in David, sometimes we need to do foolish things in order to build that trust and to strengthen our faith. Like a mustard seed, even a small amount of faith (recall that Jesus tells Peter, as he steps out of the boat onto the water, that he has a *little* faith) can grow into something strong and magnificent. David’s trust in God allowed him to rescue sheep from the mouths of lions, to defeat Goliath, the nine-foot giant, with only a handful of stones, and to conquer countless enemies as king of Israel.

If we never *practice* trusting, however, we cannot expect that trust, that faith, to grow. And that’s how we come back to my turning down the job offer. For me, this was an exercise in trust. Jesus, in the Gospels, says “Do not be afraid. Just trust me.” (Luke 8:50 – paraphrase) God knows that I am bad at that. Here was an opportunity to practice it.

And so, to end, I would like to ask you a question, to ask you to really examine your own heart and to explore, honestly, who is it that you trust?