

March 26, 2017

Wilderness Training: Expect The Unexpected

First Reading ~ 1 Samuel 16:1-13

YHWH said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have not chosen him to be ruler of Israel. Fill your horn with oil, and be on your way. For I am sending you to Jesse in Bethlehem, for I have chosen my ruler from among his children." But Samuel replied, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, I will be murdered." YHWH replied, "Take a heifer with you: I am sending you to Jesse. Tell him you came to offer a sacrifice to YHWH, and invite Jesse to the sacrifice. Then I will show you what to do."

Samuel did what YHWH said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met Samuel. They asked, "Do you come in peace?" Samuel said, "Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to YHWH. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me." Then he consecrated Jesse and his children and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they arrived, and Samuel saw Eliab, he thought, "Surely God's anointed now stands here before YHWH." But YHWH said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have not chosen him. YHWH does not see as humans see; humans see only outward appearances. YHWH sees into the heart." Then Jesse called Abinadab to pass before Samuel, who said, "No. YHWH has not chosen this one." Next came Shammah, but Samuel said, "Not this one either." Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "YHWH has not chosen any of these." Samuel asked, "Are all your sons here?"

"There is still the youngest," Jesse said, "but he is keeping the sheep." Samuel said to Jesse, "Send for him; we will not begin the sacrificial banquet until the lad arrives." So they sent for the boy, a ruddy youth with bright eyes and handsome to behold. YHWH said, "Rise and anoint this one." Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed the boy in the presence of his brothers; and from that day forward the spirit of YHWH came mightily upon David and was with him. Then Samuel set out on his way to Ramah.

Second Reading ~ adapted from John Pavlovitz in *"The Second Coming of the Progressive Heretical Jesus"*

Jesus was a progressive. He came with a bold, clear vision, not with vague religious nostalgia. He started a revolutionary underground movement, not a top-down theocracy of privilege. And he didn't harken back to some mythical glorious time in the past. He said that Heaven had now come- a new counterintuitive way of living and of being in the world, one marked by goodness.

His message for the religious elite of his faith tradition was not a “return to family values”. It was the warning that new wine cannot be held in old, dried-up, brittle wineskins, that something beautiful had come to burst from the rigid, lifeless container that could no longer hold it— the one called religion.

And Jesus was a heretic.

He claimed to be God, but One coming not as a mighty political power as many Israelites were expecting; not as an armed, avenging soldier, but as a humble, suffering servant who would get low to lift up others. He came in paradox as the God who would wash feet.

He declared us all responsible for each other, our neighbors, even our enemies. His followers created interdependent communities where each was accountable to the other. He was a maker of peace, a turner of cheeks, a lover of all; a homeless, dark-skinned Jewish Rabbi, who said that love of wealth would make it almost impossible to really see God or to live well.

And now, two thousand years later, it seems the job of revealing the character of God is once again in the hands of the heretics, sinners, and unlikely mercy-givers.

Perhaps this will be remembered as the time the Christianity of Christ died in the cloistered, opulent American Church, and was resurrected in the gutter among the heathens and backsliders. Just as he first came in a form that was blasphemous and scandalous to the bloated religious elite of his time, so he is coming again in a way that is not expected, but is no less revelatory about the breadth of the love of God.