

“Seeing Through God’s Eyes”

Scripture: 1 Samuel 16 (selected verses)

Rev. Lucy Crain

November 9, 2025



I talked with a wonderful colleague this week who had taken his family to a photo shoot for their annual Christmas card photo. Depending on your ease in front of a camera or the number of small children you care for, feelings about having a family photograph taken range from minor inconvenience to full-on panic. My family falls firmly into the latter category as we now have to coordinate five busy schedules across various time zones, and to be honest, I personally have never found a friend in the camera. However, a few years ago, the Crains managed an awkward photo shoot and then went across the hall to explore the “buying options for every budget.” I rarely purchase more than a token family shot and was somewhat surprised when my youngest son asked me for an individual photo of him to accompany his resume. It was a nice looking shot, with digital touch-up available, so I purchased an individual one for him, a family one for my mother-in-law’s Christmas, and then we were on our way to a “thank goodness that is over” dinner.

In all seriousness, our culture’s emphasis on outward appearance creates real anxiety for many of us—and it’s expensive. The quest for beauty is now a \$105 billion industry in the United States alone. NBC’s Today show found that the average woman spends six and a half hours a week on her appearance, with men not far behind at four and a half. You parents in the room might not be surprised that teenage girls top the list at nearly eight hours per week. And despite all that time and effort, nearly 80% of young girls report negative thoughts about their appearance every week.

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It’s no wonder so many of us struggle with self-esteem or body image. The pressure to present our best possible outward selves is relentless. But before we rush to judgment about vanity, we should also admit something uncomfortable: looking good indeed pays off.

Economist Daniel Hamermesh measured the practical advantages of beauty and spoke to it in his book, *Beauty Pays*. Hamermesh demonstrates that “better looking” people experience startling yet undeniable advantages - they are more likely to be interviewed, employed, and receive more substantial pay. In fact, studies have found that in the US, above-average beauty translates into 10% to 15% higher salaries than below-average beauty.¹ (Maybe that professional headshot for my son’s resume wasn’t such a bad idea after all!)

In our passage today, even the prophet Samuel wasn’t immune to judging by appearances. When God sends him to Bethlehem to anoint a new king, Samuel takes

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tomaspremuzic/2019/07/17/its-time-to-expose-the-attractiveness-bias-at-work/#72dbe31f1324>

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one look at Jesse’s oldest son and thinks, “*Surely the Lord’s anointed stands before me.*” No interviews, no references—just an impressive appearance.

It’s easy to imagine why. Eliab must have reminded Samuel of Israel’s first king, Saul. Scripture tells us that there was not a man among the people more handsome than Saul and that he stood head and shoulders above everyone else. Saul looked like a king. Eliab did too. Saul and Eliab presented physically as a king should – at least in human eyes.

Yet Saul’s good looks did nothing to hold him in the Lord’s favor. The Spirit of God was with Saul in his early years and the enemies of Israel were delivered into his hands. Things were going well for the newly created monarchy but in an almost predictable tale, Saul let his success go to his head and he became self-reliant and disobedient to the Lord. Our story passage today begins with the Lord telling Samuel to move on from Saul. The Lord has rejected him as king, and it is time to find a new leader for Israel. For the Lord could see Saul’s true character even if the people could not. Hence, Samuel started out on a journey for the kingdom, carrying a horn of oil and a heavy heart.

We as readers do not know what the Lord saw in the heart of Jesse’s eldest son, Eliab, but the Lord rejects him as a future king. We don’t know if Eliab lacked leadership skills or if there was something deeply flawed in his personality. Despite having the

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perfect head shot, the Lord did not see this young man, or any of his other brothers, as the next king. Indeed, the Lord rebuked Samuel for looking only at physical beauty and not at what is truly important. And then comes the line that anchors this story and our faith: “The Lord does not see as mortals see; looking at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

The Lord looks at the heart... We tend to think of the heart today as our emotional center. One look at the Hallmark aisle in February can confirm that we consider the heart as the origin of our loving feelings. However, to the ancient Israelites, the heart was much more. If considering a bodily organ, it was more like the brain. The heart was the center of the human personality, their core. The heart was the totality of intellect, intuition, and emotion. The heart was one’s entire being. The Lord sees the totality of a person – their complete selves, their potential and possibility. The Lord sees the heart.

And here is what is remarkable: God’s vision is all-emcompassing and extends to one who is not even physically present with those gathered. After the Lord has rejected all seven of Jesse’s sons, Samuel asks, “Do you have ANY more sons, Jesse?” Jesse admits that there is indeed one more. One youngest boy, the eighth and lowliest son, not even worthy of attending the sacrifice but left-behind, keeping the sheep. This boy

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was not sanctified by the priest at the sacrifice and is as yet unnamed at this point in the story. This last son appears almost as an afterthought of his father after his older brothers do not win the Lord’s favor. It is not as if Jesse intentionally left his youngest out of the line-up; he probably had just forgotten about him.

Yet the Lord saw this forgotten son. The community is not complete while even one is excluded and the Lord knows it – the Lord can see it - and Samuel says to the those gathered with some urgency, “somebody go get that boy!” “We are not even going to sit down until he gets here.” You can almost hear the agitation in Samuel’s voice as if they have all just been wasting time without the complete family present. So the review process is halted, they send for this last son, and they wait. The suspense has been building as the Lord rejects son after son and no king is found – but now the action stops, now the community waits, the reader waits, we all wait.

As we look to the season of Advent, we also wait – preparing our hearts for the moment when the Lord will resume the action and bring reconciliation and wholeness to all creation through the unexpected birth of a king: a servant leader the world did not see as worthy by human standards and certainly not the one to bring about the restoration of the kingdom. As we wait in our own time, wondering when that

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restoration will come, God invites us to see beyond the values of mortals and see as God sees – to see what really matters, WHO really matters.

Human blindness has often prevented the work of the Lord but God sees what mortals cannot. God sees those we have left outside the community. Who are living on the margins today that have become invisible? Has the importance of physical beauty blinded us to the potential of those outside our own bubble? Homelessness is not beautiful but all of God’s children are; mental illness is certainly not pretty but God’s children are made in God’s image. Addiction, poverty, and hunger are all messy and ugly but have we ignored those who suffer because they have accepted their fate as unworthy and not asked for our attention? Who are we forgetting? Who is going after them?

God invites us to see all people as God sees them, not as mortals looking at outward appearance but looking at the heart. God invites us to trust in God’s ability to lift up even the most vulnerable among us. God wants us to open the doors of our church for Room in the Inn and to fill our pantry for hungry children. Only when all are invited in can the Spirit move freely among us.

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We sometimes forget how powerful it can be to a people or community when they feel they are seen and valued. A few years ago, I participated in hosting a group of university students from an outreach partner in Palestine. These incredibly talented and creative young people were studying culinary and creative arts and shared their gifts with us in generous and amazing ways. We had a fabulous celebration on their last night with art, music, dancing and much laughter... The following morning, the atmosphere was starkly different as the group gathered to say goodbye. It was raining steadily and matched our mood as we prepared to send these delightful, intelligent young people, full of potential and possibility, back to a dangerous land where they are oppressed and their gifts are undervalued and ignored. Our hearts were heavy and a comment was made about the appropriateness of the dreary day. However, one lovely young student commented that she lives in a desert where rain is considered a great blessing – rain brings hope. She then thanked us for hosting them in our community and bringing them hope. “You see,” she said, “we thought we had become invisible. We thought the world had forgotten about us but you brought us into the light.”

In our scripture passage today, when the invisible son is finally welcomed into the community, the action can then continue. Unlike our societal blindness and superficiality, the Lord doesn’t see only David’s flaws, of which there were many, the Lord sees his heart – his potential, his whole being. The Lord commands Samuel to “rise and anoint him” and the Lord’s spirit descends upon him mightily. The Lord not only sees and welcomes in this forgotten son but lifts him up and honors him in the eyes of the people. David, previously unnamed and outside the group, the lowly

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shepherd, unsanctified and ignored, is anointed as king with both oil and spirit. Now that the excluded one has been brought in, the Lord can rejoice in the collective heart of the people, the potential and possibility for a future where the Lord’s creation is gathered together. When all are included, the Holy Spirit can be on the move again and Israel’s story, our own story, is ready to go forward now that the community has been restored.

All Thanks Be to God.