

"SEEING WHAT GOD SEES"

June 2, 1991

TEXT: 1 Samuel 16:7 ". . . for the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

Somewhere or other I have read that one of the hardest things about the training a seeing-eye dog is to get it to see through its master's eyes. Assume, for instance, that a man six feet tall is walking down the street. He comes to a tree that has a branch five and a half feet above the ground. From the viewpoint of the dog, that limb poses no problem at all. So it must be taught to see through the eyes of its master, who might otherwise take a nasty blow to the head.

And that is a pretty good parable for all of us as we try to live the Christian life. There are times when we, too, need to see through our master's eyes. When we need to see what God sees, and act accordingly.

We have an example of that in this morning's scripture, where Samuel is told to pick a new king for Israel. What a no-win situation that was. The man he picked would no doubt get the credit if he turned out well. But I can just imagine the complaints if he did not work out. "What in the world was Samuel thinking of when he picked him?" "How could he ever have chosen a king like that?" "I certainly hope Samuel doesn't get to pick our next king." "What we need around here is a better king-picker!"

As I said, it was a no-win situation. And, to make matters even worse, Israel already had a king. A large, muscular fellow named Saul, who had a very short fuse and who would not be at all happy to hear that Samuel was out choosing his replacement. But that is what God told him to do, so, with fear and trembling, Samuel went to Bethlehem to interview the candidates.

I suspect we can all appreciate Samuel's relief when he saw Eliab. For Eliab looked every inch a king. He was tall. He was strong. He was handsome. And something in his bearing deeply impressed Samuel, who joyfully said to himself, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him."

And no doubt we can also understand Samuel's disappointment when God disagreed with him. "Look not on his countenance or on the height of his stature," God said, "because I have refused

him: for the Lord sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

Well, that is the word that I would like to share with you this morning: "The Lord sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." It reminds us that, like that seeing-eye dog, we also tend to see things as they look to us. But, if we really want to serve God, we need to "See What God Sees."

Take, for instance, the way we look at people. Too often we judge them by their appearance. We think of them as black or white, rich or poor, cultured or uncultured, handsome, plain, or ugly and treat them accordingly. That has led some observers to suggest that no one will ever again be elected President of the United States unless he, or she, is tall, rich, handsome, and charming. "For man looks on the outward appearance."

And sometimes our judgment is skewed by other things, too. Consider this imaginary memo to Jesus from the Jordan Management Consultants. It says:

Dear Sir:

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have selected for management positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests, and we have run the results through our company computer. Each of them has also been interviewed by one of our psychologists and vocational consultants. The complete profile on each is included for your consideration.

It is our staff's opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education, and aptitude for the type of work you are undertaking. We would recommend that you search for persons with more managerial experience and proven leadership abilities.

One candidate, however, does show great potential. He is a man of ability and initiative, meets people well, and has a keen business mind. He is highly motivated and is both energetic and resourceful. We recommend as your comptroller and right-hand man, Judas Iscariot."

"For man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

And what about the way we look at life? When something happens that we do not like, how quick we are to assume that it must be bad. That, you see, is just what Peter did when Jesus said that the Son of Man would have to suffer, and be killed, and on the third day rise again. Peter said, "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you!" And Jesus had to use some pretty strong language to set him straight. He said, "Get thee

behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me, for you are not on the side of God, but of men."

But do we not often react the same way whenever life gets challenging? We say to ourselves, "God forbid! This should never happen!" And, in our disappointment, we may even turn our backs on God and, thereby, forfeit the only strength that can really help us. We so easily forget that, as E. Stanley Jones once wrote, the real purpose in life is not happiness, but growth. And, for that reason, life sometimes has to be hard. Hard enough to sharpen a soul upon.

In some ways, I suppose we can not really help ourselves. Unlike God, we can not see into people's hearts. Nor can we always recognize the pearls that God is making from the things we find so irritating. But we can still do this. We can keep an open mind and not be so quick to judge. We can look for the good in things --and in people-- and try to work with that good. And we can try to know God better --through scripture, prayer, and sacrament-- that we may become more adept at "seeing what God sees." May that be our prayer this morning as we come to our Lord's table. AMEN.