

“The Heart of the Matter”

Mark 4:26-34  
1 Samuel 15:34-16:13

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There was once a schoolboy named Dan. He was athletic, handsome, and liked by everyone. At his school they occasionally had dances. It was tradition that the girls would line up and the boys would line up. The first in line got the first choice and so on. Inevitably Mary was always chosen last. She had polio as a child and walked with a limp. She was not pretty, she was shy, and she was overweight.

One day before the upcoming dance, the teacher approached Dan, "Dan, I would like you to choose Mary tomorrow at the dance." Dan was stunned. Not choose the prettiest? What? That goes against the laws of nature? But then the teacher said what to Dan seemed totally unfair and yet he knew she was right, "It's the Christian thing to do, Dan."

The next day the students lined up in their cruel tradition. Dan tried to get in what he thought would be the back of the line in hopes of not having to choose Mary over anyone else. But what looked like the back of the line the teacher made the front of the line. Dan gulped and said in almost an inaudible mumble, "I choose Mary..."

The class was stunned into silence and Mary who had turned to the side not even paying attention expecting the inevitable, turned and beamed. An expression of surprise, gratitude and pride exuded from her whole being. And for a moment she was the envy of the class.

To Dan's surprise as she put her arm in his he felt that it was he that did not deserve her. He only did what his teacher made him do and there beside him was a heart overflowing with gratitude that he did not deserve. But, indeed he had done the Christian thing, the Christ-like thing, the God-like thing.

Surely David was at least as surprised as Mary when the great prophet Samuel chose him to be anointed as king. David was the youngest of many brothers. He was stuck with what was considered to be the lowliest duty of the family: watching the sheep.

But God who doesn't judge by the standards of this world saw in David's heart something that the others perhaps lacked: the heart of a servant. To the world, servants are those that leaders tell what to do. Like Saul, who was the kind of leader the world loves. Tall strong, handsome, leads his men into battle with his own sword. But the problem is that Saul didn't obey the Lord's commands. He went his own way, as many of the leaders we choose tend to do.

My guess is that we are not capable of choosing a truly humble servant to be a leader. In this age of media, where image is everything there is no room for the Mary's of this world, the ones who would be truly grateful for being chosen and would do their

best to serve, especially the underserved of the world. But we like the tall, strong-jawed, sharp-witted leaders whose ambition drives them to the top and ultimately pulls us all to the bottom.

And yet time and time again we see throughout the Bible, God chooses people that nobody would ever suspect. Abraham, a nomadic shepherd, Moses, a stuttering fugitive, Esther, a foreign slave-girl, and our subject for the next couple of months, David, the youngest of a relatively poor family, in the least powerful tribe of Israel.

The Kingdom of God is not built on the efforts of the most capable in the world. The verse we read this morning was, "And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward." The building of the Kingdom of God is done by the Spirit empowering people that the world might never have chosen, but in whom God simply sees willingness.

God saw willingness in David, a desire to serve. And where God sees willingness, he sees a person that can be used in transforming the world. The ambitious, those that only trust in their own power or the powers of the world are of little use to God. God wants servants. God wants people who are willing to do the dirty work, the behind the scenes work, whatever work that God wants done.

Christopher Wren, who designed St. Paul's Cathedral in London, one of the most beautiful buildings in the world, wrote about the reactions of construction workers who were asked what they were doing. Those workers who were bored and tired responded by saying, "I'm laying bricks" or "I'm carrying stones."

But one worker, who was mixing cement, seemed cheerful and enthusiastic about his work. Asked what he was doing, he replied, "I'm building a magnificent cathedral."

I suspect this worker, had something like what David had, a willing heart. He wasn't looking to be in charge. He wasn't looking for glory. He didn't do his work begrudgingly; in fact he believed that he was a part of building something beautiful, something good. He saw beyond the bricks and stones of his trade.

My friends, we are a part of building an everlasting kingdom, one of such beauty and grace this world has never seen or maybe even imagined. Our tasks do not always seem grand, or world changing. It may just be sweeping the floors. Helping to pay the electric bill. Opening our gym up to neighborhood kids. Serving a meal on Sunday evenings. Opening our cabin for Narcotics Anonymous. Singing a few hymns, saying a few prayers on Sunday morning. Collecting clothes and food for people we only see once a year in Harlan, KY. Or maybe just lending a helping hand to a passerby that we may only see once.

But out of these little bricks and stones, out of our willingness to do thankless tasks and small jobs, God is building a magnificent cathedral, an everlasting kingdom, one big enough very everyone. The Mary's, the un-chosen of the world, but also the

ambitious of the world, the ones who have used their abilities for their own goals. Those same abilities used for self-advancement and self-preservation can be used for God's kingdom...all it takes is a willing heart...a heart ready and willing to serve. It's not a matter of our position in this world...it's a matter of the position of your heart.