

June 17, 2018

“Books and Covers”

1 Sam. 16:6-7, 11-13; 2 Cor. 5:12, 16-17; Mk. 4:26-32

After reading today’s Scripture from 1 Samuel concerning the Lord’s admonition to not judge by outward appearance, but rather, by the heart, you *might* be able to discern what well-known saying gave rise to the sermon title... “*Don’t judge a **book** by its **cover**.*” Oh, you’re familiar with it! ☺ Okay, here’s a little tougher one: Do you know WHERE this saying came from? You musical-types might know that there was a song in the 60’s by Bo Diddley that had this very title... But as far as we can tell, the phrase was likely coined about a hundred years earlier. In the *Piqua (OH) Democrat* (I wonder why they never have a paper called the ‘Republican’?)... and if you happen to know just WHERE ‘Piqua Ohio’ IS, you get bonus points... the following statement was made in June of 1867: “*Don’t judge a book by its cover, see a man by his cloth, as there is often a good deal of solid worth and superior skill underneath a jacket and yaller pants.*”

Now, I’m not really sure what to make of the whole ‘yaller pants’ comment (since I doubt it was about one of those obnoxious pairs of pants you might see tailgating at an LSU football game!) but the meaning of the expression is quite clear: that we should not judge a person’s worth simply by what we can see with our ‘naked eye’... but rather, to look more closely behind one’s exterior to truly ‘see’ their value and worth. That sometimes, to borrow from another well-known phrase, ‘*Looks can be deceiving.*’ Even if you ARE wearing ‘yaller pants’...

As to the origin of that ‘Don’t judge a book by its cover’ expression, we might go MUCH further back than the 1860’s. Unless you’re talking more like ‘B.C.’ than ‘A.D.’! For in today’s passage from 1 Samuel (actually believed to have been written over 900 years B.C.), the Lord God, in Samuel’s search for a successor to King Saul amongst the sons of Jesse, speaks words of caution to his ‘royal recruiter’: “*the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the*

outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Sam. 16:7) Or, more simply, ‘Don’t judge a book by its cover.’ But rather, by what is on the INSIDE.

All three of today’s lectionary readings basically address this central issue. How God, in his infinite wisdom and power, can use the most UN-likely of instruments for His glory. A king from a young shepherd boy. A new creation made from an old one. A large plant from a tiny seed. Small beginnings... leading to great results. These three passages all point to US, and how God can use our **hearts** no matter what our ‘**outward appearance**’ may be. That no matter what your ‘**cover**’ may look like... what really counts is the **book** inside.

What I have always found a bit puzzling about the story about God’s call of David through Samuel is the description of David that follows the rejection of all of his brothers. “*Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome.*” (1 Samuel 16:12) God had JUST finished saying how NOT to look at the *outward* appearance, and here we are talking about how *outwardly* handsome David was! Do you feel my ‘disconnect’ here? Unless this is to say that David had all of those young, *boyish* good looks fine for an apprentice shepherder, but what they were looking for was a MAN to be the King of a mighty nation. Not just ‘another pretty face’...but to be sure to look inside the ‘cover’...

Perhaps the focal point of this story is not so much David, but **Samuel**. Rather than go with ‘conventional wisdom’ on who to choose for such a vitally important position as king, Samuel **listened** to God. Samuel **trusted** in God. Rather than trusting in his own wisdom, listening to his own voice, Sam listened to the voice of God... perhaps one as soft as a gentle whisper... that said, “*Rise, and anoint him; for this is the one.*” (1 Samuel 16:12) Because he listened, and trusted in God’s direction, Samuel would see in David something that no one else did. A deep ‘book’ behind what might seem to be a shallow ‘cover.’ It reminds us all that we must be careful to look beyond outward appearances to understand the true depth of what lies underneath.

Earlier I mentioned an exciting new ministry to the homeless that is being birthed right behind the sanctuary [in Lake Charles]. “**Beacon House.**” Now, this is not to say that when the leadership was apprised of this opportunity by our partners in ministry, First Christian, that EVERYONE was so ‘excited.’ After all, as Presbyterians we are all about everything being ‘decent and in good order’... not necessarily words associated with the homeless. There were... and still are... many concerns. And that’s understandable!

But after having met Mr. Bob Richard, the spearhead of this project, and getting a chance to open up the ‘cover’ of this homeless advocate and reading a few ‘pages’ of the ‘book’ of his character, I am very excited about what this could mean to the community. For aside from providing much needed services as simple as clean clothes and a hot shower (which we take for granted), it will serve as a source of referrals to help men, women, and children have a better quality of life. And even more importantly, it will serve to do what we, the church, are *supposed* to be all about: communicating to those who are hurting that they have value in God’s eyes. Value that goes deeper than what we see from their outward appearance. That we care about what the Lord sees... their **heart**. And all THESE eyes of ours have to do... at least in this case... is **watch**... and **learn**...

Now, there might be those who would be thinking, ‘OK, pastor, that’s all well and good, but WE live in the real world. We KNOW that a lot of these folks have mental problems, shady backgrounds, and looking for a handout. Do we REALLY want ‘these people’ hanging around our church?’ (None of YOU, of course! 😊)

And I’m not going to deny that some people that come to the Beacon House will have their ‘issues.’ But who among us DOESN’T? A pretty wise man once said something about ‘the one who is without fault casting the first stone.’

Whether it’s a ministry to the homeless, or tutoring in the schools, or building a Habitat Home, or bringing snacks to a hospital waiting room// , what matters most is NOT the ‘condition’ of the **person** we are ministering to, but the ‘condition’ of our **heart**. In Paul’s words, *“From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view... so if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old is passed away; see, everything is become new.”* (2 Corinthians 5:16-17)

I know that one of the challenges our congregation faces is the ‘A-G-E’ of its members. Well, I would suggest to you that it’s not so much about our ‘chronological’ age as it is our ‘spiritual’ maturity. We should not regard one another strictly from a ‘human’ point of view, but from a DIVINE one. That if anyone of us is in Christ, we ARE a new creation. The old is GONE. The new has begun! No matter what your ‘occupation status’ may say, your FAITH should NEVER ‘retire!’ The Christian faith that sustains you, that nurtures and encourages you, is TIMELESS! And that your JOB remains the same: to help pass along to future generations an inheritance of faith that will sustain, nurture, and encourage them. That when they look in the

mirror, they see the face of God, who loves them and will never leave them. No matter what that 'outward appearance' may look like, there can be a faith that is 'new every morning'...

You and I are called by God for a purpose. In one classic expression, our 'chief goal' is "*to glorify God and enjoy him forever.*" We know that we should listen to and trust in God, careful to not judge others by their outward appearances, but rather, by their heart. We know that by our faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, we are a new creation, made to do good works in response to that newness of life we have in Him. Both in our individual lives, and our corporate lives in the church, we are charged to leave behind a Godly legacy.

How? We have so many challenges to being a force for God. Personal limitations of time... Age... Financial constraints... Relationship challenges... Spiritual weaknesses. I'm just one person. **What can I do?**

This past week I had the privilege of meeting a lady by the name of **Cheri McDaniel**. Raised in the Depression Era in rural Union Parish, she changed careers at age 30 from hospital dietician to very successful homebuilder... pretty unheard of in that male-dominated vocation in the 1960's. Especially for one who had NO formal training in that field! At age **75** she moved to San Miguel, Mexico to establish a mission to underprivileged in that area. Her heart for international mission is what brought her to the meeting I attended, at which she very articulately, and *passionately*, expressed the needs of a boarding school facility in Haiti, the most impoverished country in the world. She personally has donated well over **one million dollars** of her own money to global mission... though SHE didn't say that, I heard it from someone else. Also not mentioned was that she was a cancer survivor, had advanced heart disease and macular degeneration, and one month ago was put under the care of hospice. But this 89 year-old dynamo shows NO signs of slowing down.

In her words, "*I believe that you shouldn't retire from something. If you don't retire to something of a higher calling, you don't feel satisfied. And the last 20 years have been the most satisfying years of my life.*"

I found this fascinating woman to be both inspiring, and embarrassing. Coming from some of the most 'dis-advantageous' beginnings one could, she made a bigger difference in the lives of her fellow men, women, and children in 20 years than most of us would do in a lifetime. But if God could use this one humble little woman from rural North Louisiana so powerfully,

how much more can he use YOU and ME? Let us NEVER sell ourselves short. Whatever your outward circumstances may be, God knows your **heart**. In the higher calling that is service to Jesus Christ, you're NEVER too old... you ARE a 'new creation.' You can accomplish great things with just a little faith... about the size of a **mustard seed**. [**pick up Bible**] And NO MATTER WHAT, just keep opening up the **cover...** to look inside the **book...**

CHARGE

In preparing for today's message, and how something as small as a mustard seed could make a very large impact, I came across this quote from Brandon O'Brien, Christian author and ministry strategist, in his book The Strategically Small Church (now just percolate on that title for a second...):

"Your church—whatever size—has everything it needs to be used in extraordinary ways for the Kingdom of God. You don't need more resources or more volunteers; you just need the imagination to see how God has equipped you uniquely to carry the gospel to your neighbors."