

## Lent 4 -

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### Universal Themes

- Down in the storeroom of my house there are two boxes, that await a trip to the Dump or to the thrift store, so my kids won't have to deal with them after I'm gone.
  - One contains all the military memorabilia gathered over 30 years...all that plaques and honors that I could have put up on an I Love Me Wall in my office, that could have been erected to commemorate the exploits of so great and distinguished a character...but I boxed all that up even before it went on the wall.
  - The other box is a fairly substantial series of books from Writers Digest that talks about the art and craft of writing. Because I had the dream that after I retired I would write the Great American Novel. I had some writing experience: for three years in my career I wrote speeches for generals and articles for military commanders that went into trade journals (under their name)...Although when I arrived here I got diverted: it dawned on me that finding shelter for the homeless might have more usefulness than another Great American Novel sitting on the remaindered book bins at Borders.
- But that interest in the craft of writing is still with me, and as I read through the Lectionary I often look at how the Lesson was crafted; what universal themes lie at the foundation of a particular story that makes it still particularly understandable across cultures and particularly true over 2,000 or 3,000 years of peoples?

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### Samuel Chooses David as future King

- The first lesson has an archetypical theme that we seem to understand on an almost unconscious level.
- In the first lesson we read about the process by which the Judge Samuel chose David to replace Saul as the future King of Israel.
  - This reading is presented to us from the viewpoint on Samuel,
    - and the lesson for Samuel (and for us) is that Samuel is successful in his search for a new king because he learns to follow God against his own judgment.

- But underlying this story about Samuel is the even more universal story of David and how he was selected over and above his seemingly more handsome and stalwart brothers.
- This tale of a shepherd boy who is chosen by God to be a King appeals to many of us across the generations because at it's core it contains the childhood myth of **"The Misunderstood Child who was Born with Special Gifts"**
  - It's the common childhood fantasy that the dreary life one lives now is not your real destiny, and that somehow you are special and gifted, but this giftedness has been held as a secret from you by adults (typically step-parents) with bad intentions.
  - Examples abound:
    - Harry Potter, who lives as an orphan with the Muggles family, who know his potential as a great sorcerer, but refuse to tell him of his powers.
    - E.B. White's The Sword in the Stone, about the boy, Harry, who doesn't realize that he's really Arthur, the future king of England
    - Luke Skywalker in Star Wars, who only slowly learns that he comes from a family of Jedi Warriors opposing the Evil Empire
    - The story told by the first great Greek Historian Herodotus about King Cyrus the Great, who was raised by shepherds in order to save his life from the murderous designs of his father, the evil King Astyages (Asti-Ages)
- In addition to the common theme of having secret gifts that we don't even know about is a second foundational understanding:
  - When one is raised from obscurity and anointed as king, or jedi or sorcerer,
    - In order to live out your real destiny one will need to trade the security of living in obscurity for an uncertain condition in which one has to suffer through many trials in living in the new reality of one's life.
- For example: David was living a quiet life as a shepherd until he was anointed by Samuel,
  - And then with this anointing came a whirlwind of hardships and trials: standing up to a murderous giant, living in hiding from King Saul, beset by enemy nations, and so on.
  - Being anointed does not bring peace and tranquility, it seems.

- Not in the life of King David, not in the life of the man born blind in the lesson from John's gospel.

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## The Man Born Blind

- The man born blind can be seen as paralleling the peaceful pre-anointed condition of David the Shepherd
  - There is nothing that indicates that the man born blind called out to Jesus and asked to be healed. As the lesson opens he is a bystander that has become the subject of a theological discussion between Jesus and his disciples,
    - As part of his lesson to his disciples, Jesus simply walks over to the man, spits into dirt to make mud spread it on the man's eyes and cured him.
      - Just as God formed clay to create humanity, Jesus creates mud to cure the man who was created imperfectly
      - Jesus, in effect, anointed the man as a fully human being
- And again, we find that, just like Samuel and David, being anointed by God does not bring peace, but conflict and exile
  - The formerly blind man is brought before the Pharisees, who accused him and his parents of being bearers of news of an improbable nature
    - (he must not have been blind in the first place), or, if indeed, he was born blind, then that just proves that he or his parents must have been notorious sinners, and all of them needed to be driven from the synagogue, so that good, decent people didn't have to listen to this kind of thing (true or not) in God's house.
- At the end, the man born blind recognizes Jesus not only as the healer who gave him sight, but also as the Son of Man
  - (The Son of Man, who in Jewish tradition, will mark the beginning of the God's final judgment).
  - At the end, the man born blind not only had his sight restored, his gift of sight also included spiritual and theological insight as well.
- The Gospel writer, John, ties all this into a theme of light and darkness that he expresses throughout his gospel, and which is echoed by Paul's when he tells the Christians in Ephesus that "now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light..."

## Our Baptismal Anointing

- These lessons about Samuel anointing David and Jesus anointing the blind man, and living as children of Light are part of an ongoing series of lessons we hear at this time of Lent to prepare us to either receive baptism or renew our baptismal vows at Easter
  - Our baptismal anointing is a sign of our being chosen
- And the stories of David and Samuel and the man born blind also remind us that
  - Being chosen gives us certain responsibilities,
    - and we live out those responsibilities in our Baptismal covenant
  - and living into that Covenant is not easy:
    - it could puts us on a high-risk road in which we are held up for ridicule, beset by dangers, hostility, and exile and our own self-doubts.
- Where do we find peace in all this? When do we find security in all this danger?
  - Psalm 23 gives us an indication:
    - Although we often think of this psalm as part of the BCP's liturgy for funerals
    - it is more especially the psalm that assures about where we will find security in the midst of terror.
  - No matter if we find ourselves in the midst of darkness and evil (verse 4)
    - Even in the darkest situations, God is never absent from us ("you are with me.")
- The final verses of the psalm explain our relationship to God and danger
  - At the end of the psalm It is not just me and God in a nice banquet that God has prepared for me.
    - The enemies are right there at the banquet, and they're right there with me:
      - "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies."
  - Apparently our enemies don't disappear when we are in God's protective household...They are there at the banquet looking on.
- But being obliged to live in the presence of our enemies, whatever those forces of evil may be, is not entirely bad

- They serve to remind us that
  - although we do live in the midst of evil,
    - that should not give us concern,
    - because we do live our lives under the hospitality of God's protection
  - That no matter how much we are filled with terror at all the forces of evil about us, God will not abandon us.
    - “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”
- We are also reminded in our Post Communion Prayer that being invited to eat at God’s banquet table also carries with it certain responsibilities.
  - Almighty and Everliving God, we thank you for feeding us with spiritual food...
    - And now, Father, send us out to do the work you have given us to do,
      - to love and serve you as faithful witnesses to Christ our Lord.
      - To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever.  
Amen