

At the heart

17 6 12

Lord you have taught us,
that all our doings without love are nothing worth:
send your Holy Spirit
and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love,
the true bond of peace and of all virtues
without which whoever lives is counted dead before you.

This morning, our text is taken from the First Book of Samuel chapter 16 verse 7:

'The Lord looks on the heart.'

How do you judge someone ? How do you know what someone is like when you first meet them ? Well, there are lots of clues: the clothes they wear; the way they speak; the way they look; their body language; eye contact; whether they smile or not ? There are lots of clues to tell us what someone is like when we have only just met them. One of my former Head Teachers, Aldon Williamson, was very good at making a quick judgement of candidates for interview. She told me she could usually select the best person for a job within a couple of minutes of meeting them and the rest of the interview process was to test out her judgement. So I guess we can sum up someone quickly on the basis of the evidence of our eyes together with our intuition. Informing both is appearance – what we can tell about someone from the way they look.

Beware: the disparity between appearance and reality provides Shakespeare with fertile ground for some of his plays. Take Prince Hal for example, heir to the throne in 'Henry IV Part One and Henry IV Part Two'. Much of the time, Hal seems to be a badly behaved teenager but we, the audience, know that his behaviour as a young man is not the real man who, as Henry V, will lead his English army to a famous victory over the French at Agincourt. What one looks like, what one appears to be, may not necessarily be who and what they are.

And so to today's passage: last week the Children of Israel clamoured for a king and they were given Saul. Mistake ! Saul turned out to be on balance an unbalanced king. Saul did not listen to the prompting of God in his heart and ultimately did not turn out to be the good king that the people had hoped for. So now was the time to choose his successor even before Saul's reign was over. Samuel had come to Bethlehem on the pretext of making a sacrifice to which he invited Jesse. Each of Jesse's sons is presented to him: Eliab; Abinadab; Shammah – seven lads in all. Samuel is impressed by the first young man. Samuel says to God, 'Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord ?' Why not ? He was a good-looking lad but God tells Samuel off in no uncertain terms. I quote in full the passage of which our text today forms but part: 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see, they look on the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart'. All seven were rejected and so Samuel asked Jesse whether he had any other sons. There was one other, Jesse's eighth and youngest boy, David, who was out in the fields tending his father's sheep. Samuel asked for him to be sent for and you know the rest: the shepherd boy, David, would

become perhaps the most famous king of Israel, and one of his direct descendants was none other than Jesus of Nazareth, our Lord and Saviour.

So what might we learn from today's text ? To beware; to be aware that judgements made on appearance may well fall short of the mark. We make the assumption that what one is like on the outside reflects what we are like on the inside. A reasonable assumption but not necessarily true. It is a sobering thought that God knows us better than perhaps we even know ourselves. It may be both worrying and reassuring that God can see into our hearts and knows who we are and what we are and what we yet might be – and still he loves us !!!

Oh and let me end with an afterthought: David's heart was not only in the right place – God could see in David the boy he was and the man and king he would become, but David also looked good too. According to 1 Samuel 16 verse 12, 'he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes and was handsome'.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

17th June, 2012

H: Sermon 26 : At the heart

