



**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**  
235 South Kenilworth Avenue, Elmhurst, IL  
*Partners in Christ's Service since 1890*

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

At Home or Small Group Worship Order

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**CALL TO GATHER**

**We are brothers and sisters in Christ.**

*Briefly, think about or share what this means to you.*

**We gather in love as God's precious children.**

*Briefly, think about or share what this means to you.*

**We celebrate the bonds of trust between us.**

*Briefly, think about or share what this means to you.*

**OPENING PRAYER**

**Spring days remind us of renewal, O God. Lent reminds us that Christ calls us to join him as his disciples to renew the world. Sustain us with your steadfast love so that we will not grow weary in the days ahead. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.**

**GLORIA PATRI**

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost  
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be,  
World without end. Amen, Amen.**

**PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH**

Lenten Prayer Hymn - Be Still My Soul (v. 1)

**Be still my soul, for God is on your side,  
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.  
Trust in your God, your savior and your guide,  
Who through all changes faithful will remain.  
Be still my soul, your best, your heavenly friend,  
Through thorny ways leads to a peaceful end.**

Silent Prayer

## PASTORAL PRAYER

God of glory, we thank you for your presence in our lives. Hear our prayers. We thank you for the goodness you shower upon us. We thank you for promises fulfilled, hopes restored, and the enjoyment of friends and families. We thank you for scientists, doctors & nurses, medical personnel, emergency responders, companies, agencies, and all who provide care and work diligently for a cure. Bless these and all your children with an outpouring of your Holy Spirit.

God of healing, as the world works together to confront the global health crisis, we come to you asking for new strength to ease our anxious hearts and grieving spirits. Be with those most affected by the Coronavirus and be with all individuals and families suffering from illness and distress. Help us to look toward the future with confidence in Christ's transforming love.

You are the source of our life and strength, O Lord. Help us resolve the conflicts in our lives and see new possibilities. Please help us understand our pain and our worries and give us gentle courage to be present with others in their time of need. We ask forgiveness as we seek to allow your word and your love to reshape our worry, reshape our mistakes, and reshape us so that we might truly become more faithful disciples of Jesus. Amen.

## OUR LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation but  
deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory  
forever. Amen.**

**SPECIAL MUSIC** – *Can be found on the church website under the Music tab.*

**SCRIPTURE & MESSAGE** –*Go to website for the audio sermon.*

1 Samuel 16: selected from verses 1-13 (NRSV)

Samuel Anoints David

The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.” And the LORD said, “Take a heifer with you, and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’”

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is now before the LORD.” But the LORD said to Samuel, “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.”

Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen any of these.” Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.”

He sent and brought him in. Now (David) was glowing, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.”

**SERMON** (audio version is on the church website)

**SEEING WELL**

The story goes something like this. There was a man whose name was Samuel, and Samuel was a Prophet of the Lord. He had special insight into what the Lord God wanted. And, he was the one who anointed Saul, the first king of Israel.

Now God commissions him to select a new king. The problem is that the old king, Saul, is still alive. The prophet points out to God that the current king won't be too keen about this idea and is apt to take it out on Samuel!

God suggests a cover story—use a religious observance. “Go to the house of Jesse in Bethlehem,” God says, “for I have chosen one of his sons to be king.”

So Samuel goes and invites Jesse and his sons to a religious service--a sacrifice. Samuel confides to Jesse that his mission is to pick one of his boys as the next king. Samuel asks Jesse for a line-up of the candidates.

The first son he gets a good look at is Eliab. Eliab looks good. Remember, the current king stood head and shoulders above others, and so does Jesse's strapping firstborn. Samuel thought he must be the one!

God says, "Don't look at his appearance or how tall he is. Don't look at how he looks. I have rejected him."

So Samuel has Jesse parade another son before him - and then another, and then another. Seven sons...but the Lord didn't choose any of these. Samuel had LOOKED at them all, and he did not SEE the one. But God had said he was going to select from one of Jesse's sons.

So Samuel asks, "Is this it? Do you have any other sons?"

Jesse answers, "Well, there is the youngest, David, who is out taking care of the sheep."

Samuel is relieved but also anxious. He says something to the effect, "We'll all just have to wait on supper until someone fetches him."

Finally, David appears. He looks good, his eyes sparkle. God says, "Rise up and anoint him for he is the one." And Samuel anoints him.

One of the marvelous things about this story is the wordplay on the Hebrew word "to see." It is an example of one of the narrative devices in many of the Hebrew Bible stories. (*Described wonderfully in the book *The Art of Biblical Narrative* by Hebrew scholar Robert Alter*)

Stories often have a theme word much like in music when a tune accompanies the description of a character like the "Imperial March" in the *Star Wars* movies that announces the arrival of Darth Vader.

With a theme word, you have the repeated occurrence of a particular word or its root word. This purposeful repetition intensifies the theme and meaning of the story.

The stories around Jacob continually use variations on the words *birthright* and *blessing*. In the book of Ruth, the words *go* and *return*. In the Samson story, the word and imagery of *FIRE* occurs again and again.

The scripture just before today's reading has many variations on listen, voice, and word. For example, Samuel tells Saul to listen to the voice of God. When the king returns victorious from battle with the forbidden bootie of livestock, the prophet Samuel is dismayed.

"I hear the voice of sheep and cattle," he says.

When Saul says that they saved just a few for sacrifice, the prophet thunderously tells that king that what the Lord wants is for him to listen, not sacrifice! Saul will confess that *he listened to the voice of his men rather than to the voice of God.*

Following this story, the narrative moves from Saul's failures to the selection of David as the new king. And, it is a move from the keyword "listen" the keyword "see."

Note the delightful play on the words *look* and *see* in today's story.

God says, "Go See whom I have chosen."

Eliab looks good, but God says, don't just look at the way he looks, see beyond his appearance. The LORD does not see as mortals see.

The Lord looks at the heart.

Samuel looks at all the boys Jesse has assembled and doesn't see God's choice.

When David appears and when the prophet gets a look at David - God says, "See, here is the one."

And the scripture says, "He has beautiful eyes (he sees well) and a goodly appearance"--- in other words, he LOOKS good!

Underscored in this story is that God oversees the process. The whole event is an exercise in seeing correctly/seeing well.

What are we to make of all this? So What? What are the implications for us? Perhaps we need to be reminded of the problems of seeing well, as well as our desire to *look* good.

Most of us are aware of the impediments to seeing well - self-interest may lead to a selective perception of others and ourselves. Our distress, or guilt, or anger may cause me to be overly critical of others or ignore the goodwill of others, which we should see. Stress may cloud our vision.

I know I have lived long enough to have noticed that when I'm asked to change, the stress of that makes me see problems that aren't even there.

The truth is, more often than not, we look only for what we expect to see.

Tom Bergeron, well-known as a television host with "Dancing with the Stars" and "America's Funniest Home Videos," tells the story of when he was hosting a daily talk show in Boston. He says, "I greeted the studio audience before the broadcast and put them through a training exercise in applause. One woman didn't seem to be buying it. She wasn't applauding at all. 'Come on,' I teased. 'You're going to have to do better than that. Show a little enthusiasm.' Minutes later, a nervous staff member came up to me in my dressing room. 'That woman you singled out called me over when you left,' she said. 'Too bad,' I said. 'She wasn't clapping.' 'Right,' the staff member agreed. 'But she just wanted you to know something. She only has one arm.'"

He went on to write, “I felt like an idiot. I was looking right at that woman, but I saw only what I needed.”

We all have the problem of “seeing well.”

Of course, one of the things we all must deal with is the question of whether we *see* ourselves correctly. Our self-image may be either too positive or too negative. One of the reasons scripture is treasured is that it enables us to look at ourselves and really *see*. We are sinners, but we are valuable to God, and God loves us.

Furthermore, we find in scripture that we need to look at others and really *see* them. As Christians, we are called to see the better side of things. We are called to be generously minded, seeking out the good, the value in another that might otherwise go unnoticed. We are called to see what God sees. To see well, to look at the heart of a person and not just look at appearances.

May God give us the grace to worry less about looking good and more about seeing well.  
Amen.

**OFFERINGS** – *We give thanks for all the gifts God gives and we give thanks for the opportunities to share our gifts for the benefit of others. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

## **DOXOLOGY**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise him, all creatures here below;  
Praise him above, ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

**HYMN** – Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee (v. 1)

**Joyful, Joyful, we adore thee, God of glory, God of love.  
Hearts unfold like flowers before thee, opening to the sun above.  
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness, drive our fear and doubt away.  
Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day.**

## **BENEDICTION**

Go forth and be of good courage. Hold fast to that which is good. Render no one evil for evil. Strengthen the faint-hearted, support the weak, help the afflicted. Honor all people. Love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Peace be with you, amen.