

North Balwyn Uniting Church
17 June 2012,
Baptism Jessica Foong
Rev. Anneke Oppewal
1 Samuel 16: 1-13, Mark 4: 26-34,

“God’s choice”

Just imagine David! One moment he’s in a field dreamily leaning his back against a tree keeping an eye on the sheep while whistling a happy tune. Next thing he knows he has been anointed King on the sly. The youngest of seven, big, burly brothers they had not even thought to include him when the prophet calls in for a visit. Too young, too small, too insignificant he is not even taken into account when there is grown-ups business to be attended to.



As for Samuel, he thought he knew who he would be anointing as Saul’s successor when tall, strong Eliab entered the room, or any of the other brothers that passed before or after him. Guys that looked like they would know how to deal with the old King, who scripture said was taller than any of his men, and powerfully built. All seven sons Jesse introduced him to at first instance looked pretty royal to him. Strong, powerful, confident men in their prime, ready to take on any challenge.

But no, somehow something is missing. The small voice inside the prophet keeps demurring: No Samuel, not this one, or this one. This is not what we are looking for. After the last one had been introduced to him Jesse asks with some desperation in his voice: “Are these all of your sons?”

He must have wondered, the old prophet. Did he get the wrong end of the stick? Perhaps he’d heard wrong, perhaps God had not told him what he thought God told him. Was it possible he had lost contact with God as well now? Just like Saul?

While Jesse tries to remember if he has another son, Samuel must have been scratching his old grey head, his heart full of doubts and question marks. Because even if Jesse has another son, if Jesse didn’t think it was worth the trouble getting him to come home for such an important occasion as a sacrificial feast with the prophet, then, even if there is one, he can’t be much of a son, that one.

“Well, there is the youngest”, says Jesse, “he is tending the sheep”. At this, experienced bible readers will immediately feel their ears prick up. The youngest? Tending sheep? Isn’t it the youngest who comes before the eldest time and again in scripture? The last who comes first? And isn’t God compared with a shepherd, looking after people like a shepherd looks after his sheep, time and again?

This is what we have been waiting for!

Not a big burly muscleman, but someone who can shepherd, like God. Someone who knows how to care, who knows how to find food and shelter. Someone who protects his sheep against whatever threatens their safety and comfort. Someone who, if need be, will

lay down his own life to save theirs. Someone who has time to dream, and whistle a happy tune with his face to the sun and his back against a tree. Someone closely connected to the world as God has created and intended it. This is him!

And there he comes.... the young shepherd boy they'd not deemed necessary to call in. No name is mentioned as yet. All he has to recommend him at first instance is a ruddy complexion and a pair of beautiful eyes. A pretty boy.

"This is him!" says Samuels old heart. "Finally!" And it must have done him good to see it is someone new, someone special, someone completely different from Saul.

His name is David, beloved, or you could perhaps even better translate the Hebrew with darling, or sweetheart. Not a name that rings with the sound of battle and military victories but a name that carries a promise for the future. It is also a name that raises a question: Will this King, in contrast to Saul, manage to be, to remain, God's beloved, God's darling? Will he be an earthly manifestation of God's Kingship? Strong enough to resist the temptation of power, of riches, of gathering fame and glory at a cost to his people?

When Samuel gets his horn out and anoints this ruddy shepherd boy the Spirit of God descends on him, ready to lead him, inspire him, and whisper into his soul how it should be done: Be a King after God's own heart.

Just imagine. It's like a fairy tale: shepherd boy anointed King, paperboy becomes CEO.

But if you think that's what this story is about you have got it wrong. Because this is not about a shepherd boy turning KING, this is about a SHEPHERD BOY turning king when God chooses someone to look after God's people.

When God wants to show how God wants the world ruled, how God wants people to be cared for and looked after, when God chooses a representative, God doesn't choose the burly Eliab or one of the other six sturdy brothers. He chooses little David, the shepherd boy they'd forgotten to invite to the party. The youngest, the smallest, the seemingly least significant.

In our midst this morning another youngest, smallest and seemingly insignificant person has been anointed. Has received the Holy Spirit and has been added to the community God has called to represent a holy, different way of living in the world. Over time, like with King David, she will be called to respond and give shape to the responsibility God has called her to.

In her, God has sown the tiny seed of a dream, of a different world waiting to grow and expand.

Apparently nobody in their right mind ever planted a mustard seed in their garden in Jesus' day. Every self-respecting gardener or farmer knew planting mustard seeds was asking for trouble. A very invasive weed that, once it took root, would be impossible to control.

They may look absolutely harmless those mustard seeds, but you wait a while and birds will be nesting in its branches.

Exactly what God is looking for. Small somethings that look like nothing but will grow like topsy given a chance. Small children in whom the seeds of love and Spirit are sown to be

given a chance to grow and become the people that God will be able to count on for making God's world a good place for everyone.

Samuel the prophet and Jesse assumed that when it came to matters of religion and politics the little ones were best left out in the field, whistling a happy tune and dreamily looking at the clouds while they attended to what they thought of as grown-up business. A mistake. God saw a boy whose face hadn't even weathered yet, a beardless boy with pretty eyes and deemed him more important than all the capable grown-ups who had gathered that morning. "This is the one my heart goes out to", God says to Samuel, "this is the one with the potential to grow into something special". And all the others are left standing around with no other job than to attend to the growth of this little one.

As a Church I think there is a very important message in that. Like first century farmers kept mustard seeds out of the land enclosed for cultivation because they thought they would take over and destroy their crops, we tend to keep anything that may invade the enclosure of our worship and Church life with something different to what we like to cultivate out. When we discuss matters of importance we talk about the children and the young people we would love to see attend our Church services, but we forget to invite them to take their rightful place right at the centre of who and what we are, respecting them as people who are God's anointed. Royalty like King David, just like all of us, destined to give God's dream shape in years to come.

God looks on the heart. God looks on Jessica, and Hailey, and Robert and Violet and the little brother or sister that is on the way, and sees people at the centre of his universe, people God wants to love and care for and invite into his presence. People full of future life whose presence is needed before decisions can be made and worship can be done. Not people waiting to grow up, and until then best kept out of the ritual enclosures where we grow spiritual foods that are to our liking, but people without whom God cannot start the next part of the journey, whom God fills with God's Spirit and whom God wants to be included, invited and accommodated and made part of God's future from the very beginning. Amen.