

AS GOD SEES

Sermon for Pentecost 2B, Proper 6: 1Sam15;34-16:13, 2Cor5:6-17, Mk4:26-34
LPC, 6/14/09

I remember seeing a PBS feature about the Spanish Conquest of the New World. I wish I could remember the details of a story about a pitched battle between Spanish and natives. I have researched this on the Internet and have been unable to identify it. If you know the historical reference, please tell me. I had thought this had something to do with Guadalupe, but I can't match my memory of the story on the show to that particular legend.

In this battle, the Spanish were evidently outnumbered and, despite their armor and technology, they were losing ground. Suddenly an apparition of the Virgin Mary appeared in a tree. This vision was seen by European and native alike. Supposedly the Spanish were inspired on to victory, while the natives shrank in terror and were easily defeated.

What I remember about the TV feature was that modern-day descendents of those natives, now good Catholics too, were interviewed for the program. They did not question the apparition, but had a different interpretation of it. The Blessed Virgin did not appear to cheer the Spanish on to victory, they said, but to plead with all her children to lay down their arms and dwell together in love.

The point is that all people do not see things the same way. Even fellow believers do not see things the same way. That much is clear by the dissension that has plagued Christ's church from the very beginning. Given the overwhelming evidence that one person does not see as another sees, you would think that it would be clear to Christians by now that one person does not necessarily see as God sees.

The Bible is quite clear in many places that God does not see as people sees. Today we have several references to support this teaching. In the Old Testament lesson, God sends the prophet Samuel to anoint a new king for Israel from among the sons of Jesse. The account is almost comical of Jesse parading his sons in front of Samuel, from oldest to youngest. Samuel is impressed by the oldest, but God says not this one. The same thing happens with the next son, and so on down. You can almost see Samuel's shoulders drooping as the last son in the room is rejected by God. Then of course, Jesse calls in the youngest, David, from the field, and as we all know God chooses him. David is handsome of course, but he *is* the youngest, and human practice is not, at least was not, to favor the youngest. But God does not see as humans see.

Then in the Gospel lesson, Jesus talks about faith the size of a mustard seed. The mustard seed is the least impressive of seeds. But God does not see as humans see. God will take even the smallest, most modest faith and make of it the very Kingdom of Heaven.

We also have Paul's letter to the Church at Corinth. I find the story of Paul's relationship to the Corinthian church very interesting, because Corinthians seem to have a lot in common with Americans. They are, generally, affluent. They are well-educated and able, and they prize excellence and competence and presenting oneself well. Their culture has been subject to a lot of influence from outside forces. The Corinthians are cosmopolitan, but the ones whom Paul is addressing have adopted Christianity wholeheartedly, and they want to do it right.

Paul has a long-standing relationship with the Corinthians. Some scholars believe the two "epistles" preserved in the New Testament are indeed compiled of fragments from at least five letters passing from the apostle to his church.

Paul is constantly having to address issues that arise in the Corinthian church, especially because of their obsession with excellence and competence and a good appearance. So, Paul in his turn finds himself calling upon the biblical teaching that God does not see as humans see. "We walk by faith, and not by sight," he tells the Corinthians, "We regard no one from a human point of view."

I hope by now the point of this sermon is clear: God does not see as humans see. In my remaining time I will address what this means to us.

The first thing to realize, from today's scripture about the future King David, is that God has a relationship even with the smallest and weakest. If we accept social conventions that judge certain people on the basis of their stature and influence, or any of the other usual cultural criteria, we are not seeing as God sees.

Secondly, knowing that God does not see as humans see should give us a little humility. We cannot assume that God's interests directly coincide with what we see as our own interests. This is something to remember if we ever don't get exactly what we pray for. This is also something to remember if choose one course over another. We hope we are acting as God would have us act, but history is full of people who commit atrocities, while convinced that God is on their side.

Thirdly, we grow in our relationship with God when we are able to consider that God may see things differently than we do. To ask, occasionally, "How might God be looking at this situation?" is an excellent spiritual exercise. How might God be seeing things differently than we do? How might God be looking at this setback? This thing I'm so proud of? This relationship of mine? This way I have of doing things?

Finally, knowing that God does not see as humans see is good news, when I see myself as sinful or unworthy, or when I see some situation as hopeless. Just because I cannot see a way out of bad times, does not mean that God can't see one. God does not see as humans do. Humans don't have to count on the same old-same old that we know so well. In God there is always more potential than we can ask or imagine. In St. Paul's words, in Christ there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!