

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro
24 October 2021

10:30 a.m. MT Worship
Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

Calvary Baptist Church
Denver, Colorado

“See(k)ing Abundance”

Second sermon in the 6-week series: *Table of Abundance*

1 Samuel 16:1-13

New Revised Standard Version

Last week we saw how young Samuel needed the elder Eli’s mentorship in order to hear God’s call. This week we meet an older Samuel who is now in direct conversation with the Lord, and yet still needs quite a bit of direction in the area of discernment and decision-making. Samuel is *seeking* to the best thing for Israel, but he cannot *see* what God sees, or rather *how* God sees. Today’s story invites us to pivot from a mindset of acquisition to vision: Do *we* really need more, or is all that we need actually within our sight already, but maybe we’re not seeing it? Does Samuel really need more choices for king, OR is all that he needs actually within his sight already if he would expand his vision field out to those fields of sheep?

Samuel had a hard job as a prophet. In the midst of a complete political and societal renovation, Samuel was the one who had to anoint leaders to demanding people who were

more concerned with keeping up with the politics of their neighboring countries than they were with keeping the law that God had given to them as a chosen, covenant people.

To say Israel was going through a leadership change is not quite accurate. Israel was going through a complete administrative re-structuring and re-ordering. They were transitioning from a system of multiple judges (who basically regulated conflict within small, specified regions) to a monarchy (where one king would rule over all of Israel). The people wanted – and had begged for – a king, and even though God cautioned against it, God counted the votes and said, well the people have spoken loud and clear: Samuel, go ahead and anoint a king.

King Saul was the first shot at this monarchy thing. And, much like God expected, Saul was a strong and mighty king – successful in warfare, but deaf to God’s commands and laws

and power hungry just like the rest of Israel. He not only didn't listen to God, his arrogance and greed kept him from seeing his own flaws. The issue wasn't that Saul kept failing, it's that he failed to ask for forgiveness or change his ways.

This is where we pick up today. With Samuel – a prophet – who is wary about going behind Saul's back to anoint a new king. And who can blame him? In verse one it's kind of jarring to read about God pushing someone to “get over” their grief, but it's only because God knows that Samuel is not *sad* about Saul, Samuel is *scared of* Saul. And God needs Samuel to move through his fear and into faith.

God tells Samuel to go to the hometown of Jesse the Bethlehemite – and he'll find his king there. This kind of thing doesn't happen every day, mind you...a prophet going to the home of an ordinary man to offer a sacrifice to God and select a king. So Samuel and the elders in Bethlehem...they all knew *something* was up. It's kind of like when the sky turns green in Texas – it's not normal – and you know a tornado is coming! But this is less whirlwind and more whiplash.

Because the king that God has in mind will turn out to be a complete 180 from Saul.

Once Samuel gets to Jesse's home – the place where God says “for I have provided for myself” a king among his sons (which in the Hebrew, is really more accurately translated “for I will SEE to it”) – meaning God is the one doing the SEEING. It's God's vision and God's seeing that leads the way here. But Samuel, of course, can't help but see the obvious choice for king from *his* perspective: Eliab – the son with the looks and stature that most resembles Saul, the only “example” of a king that Israel had. Samuel thinks to himself, “*surely this is the one,*” but before that thought can become words on his tongue the Lord quips back in Samuel's head: “*For the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart,*” (v7). (“Okay, so what *I'm seeing* is NOT the full picture...got it God!”...thinks Samuel.)

So with this mantra in his mind, Samuel evaluates the other choices that Jesse brings before him. I don't know about you, but I imagine this whole scene playing out like something from Project Runway or America's

Next Top Model – these sons walking down, showing off their strength and muscles, handing their resume to the judges, and then tossing their long locks behind them as they turn and walk away. But one by one, as the brothers present themselves – they are suitable in handsomeness, but not in heart. And at the end of the line-up when Samuel double checks to make sure this is it – these are all the sons he has to choose from – sure enough, he finds out there is more. There is *one* more son. And in this case, just *one more* is *more than enough*.

This son is not in immediate eyesight. In fact, he’s not even in the vicinity of his dad’s home or of this ritual sacrifice or selection process that’s going on. He is out in the fields tending sheep. We come to know this son, of course, as David. “*Rise and anoint him; for this is the one,*” (v12).

Samuel was seeking a new king for Israel, but he was only seeking a king from the selection of sons that was right before him. And that’s because Jesse only saw certain sons as ‘fit’ to be king. Chalk it up to our human propensity to favor

strength, age, and good looks for positions of power and leadership OR chalk it up to the fact that Saul was the only example of a king they had to go on, either way – Jesse and Samuel – they had “tunnel vision” when it came to the type of person that was needed to be king.

Medically speaking, ophthalmologists say that tunnel vision is the loss of peripheral vision; it’s a visual field defect producing the effect of perceiving the world through a long tunnel or tube, so that you are only seeing what is directly in front of you.¹

Metaphorically speaking, psychologists will tell you that tunnel vision is the reluctance to consider alternatives to one's preferred line of thought; instances may include physicians treating patients and only seeing one diagnosis as fitting their symptoms based on previous patients they just saw or a study they just read, detectives considering crime suspects and viewing evidence in light of the suspect that they already think probably committed the crime, or really anyone predisposed to a favored

¹ <https://dictionary.apa.org/tunnel-vision>

outcome.² This can happen in any profession and to any person. Tunnel vision happens when we have bias from preceding incidents or when we just have a hyper focus in one direction. Having tunnel vision results in an inability to see everything that is in the picture because you are so focused on one thing.

There have been multiple studies on the psychological pattern of having tunnel vision, and how it effects human behavior. There is a whole *Hidden Brain* podcast on this subject called “You 2.0: Tunnel Vision” which I highly recommend. It centers on this question: *Have you ever noticed that when something important is missing in your life, your brain can only seem to focus on that missing thing?*³

This is *scarcity mentality*, and it touches on many aspects of our lives, making it difficult for us to focus on anything other than the problem right in front of us or the thing that we feel is lacking in our lives. The over-worked and time-starved folks spend much of their mental energy (and time!) juggling their

schedules and worrying about how much time they don’t have. People with little money worry constantly about making ends meet and how they’ll pay the next bill. People who are alone but want friends or a relationship will be so focused on this that they will only see the world through all the couples or friend groups around them or they’ll obsessively be on apps trying to meet people when there are people right in front of them, etc.

And this matters because the experts tell us that scarcity takes a huge toll on us...whatever the stressor is in our lives – the thing that makes us feel we are lacking – it robs us of insight and creativity and the ability to actually problem solve around that issue in meaningful ways. *“And it helps to explain why, when we’re in a hole, we sometimes dig ourselves even deeper.”*⁴ We probably don’t researchers to tell us this – but maybe it makes us feel better to have some science backing up our spiritual and psychological struggles!

And apparently, once we are in this scarcity mindset, we can’t

²[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tunnel_vision_\(metaphor\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tunnel_vision_(metaphor))

³ Shankar Vedantam, “You 2.0: Tunnel Vision,” *Hidden Brain Podcast* (5 Aug. 2019), accessed on October 24, 2021 at <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/748207152>.

⁴ Vedantam, *ibid.*

see what there is to gain only what there is to lose. Research shows that “we're 2.5 times as likely to want to *not* lose anything as we are to want to gain something,”⁵ which just makes us cling on tighter to what we have and narrow our vision even more.

It's not that we *want* our vision to get narrow, it's just that it happens naturally when we are focused on not having enough – whether that's food, money, time, friends, relationships, health and so forth. Fear of losing the few things we do have takes up a lot of heart space and head space!

“Think of it like bandwidth. If you're downloading a movie on your home Wi-Fi network, you might find your email runs a little slower. The movie is hogging all the available bandwidth. Well, our minds work exactly the same way. If your mind is consumed with thoughts about something, there isn't room to think about other stuff. Scarcity fills the mind with intrusive thoughts about what you do not have. It doesn't leave room for anything else.”⁶

⁵ Sarah Regan, “How To Release Scarcity & Adopt An Abundance Mindset, For Real,” *MBGMindfulness* (24 Jan. 2021), accessed on Oct. 24, 2021 at <https://www.mindbodygreen.com/articles/abundance-mindset>.

The researchers say there's a simple way to demonstrate this. Try to hold an eight-digit number in your mind, say 2-6-7-1-7-1-6-4. As you try to remember that number, it leaves you less able to listen to and comprehend and remember other things.⁷ So I'll invite you stop trying to remember that number now so that you keep listening to the sermon! 😊

And there's a reason our minds work this way. *“Tunneling into something makes you focus on it. Everything inside the tunnel becomes crystal clear. The problem is you can't see anything outside the tunnel.”*⁸

Of course, “tunnel vision is not in itself a good thing or a bad thing. Shutting out distractions can be helpful at times, especially when we're trying to focus on a task at work or home. *The question is, do you know when you're inside the tunnel?*”⁹ The thing is – when it comes to the big, important things in life (not just a deadline at work) often the answer is *no, we don't know when we're in a tunnel*, especially when we're in deep.

⁶ Vedantam, *ibid.*

⁷ Vedantam, *ibid.*

⁸ Vedantam, *ibid.*

⁹ Vedantam, *ibid.*

So that's where other people come in, other perspectives, other systems of support.

The researchers gave a great example of this: It's easy for pilots to get tunnel vision, especially when something goes wrong – because the stakes are so high. “There was a time not long ago when we thought that airline pilots who made mistakes were just bad pilots. A big reason air travel has become safer in recent decades is that there has been a shift in thinking about such mistakes. Designers have made cockpits fault-tolerant. Rather than trying to find perfect pilots, cockpits are now designed to account for human error. The goal is to alert pilots when they've made a mistake and to diminish the consequences of mistakes.”¹⁰ Wouldn't it be nice to have this kind of system in all aspects of our lives?!

But we kind of do with other people, don't we? We have the ability to move from a scarcity mindset and into an abundance mindset by getting a second opinion, which is usually a term we think about in terms of medical diagnoses – but why not use this tool in all areas of

our life? Get someone from outside of your life or outside of the immediate situation, to help you look at whatever it is you feel like is scarce or missing in your life. Because they do not have the same biases or preconceptions as you do, and they may help you expand your field of vision.

So back to our text for today. God was recasting a vision for Israel that wasn't rooted in a royal dynasty and that didn't cater to the societal norms of “well, that's just the way things work.” God has a history of not paying heed to typical ‘first-born’ rights. God often favors the youngest or the one likely “to-not-be-chosen.” God is looking outside of the box – beyond the ordinary or expected. God does not have tunnel vision of what a king should look like or be like, God is looking for what might be unused or un-tapped potential, in order to anoint a leader that is “holy.” Holy, literally means, “set apart.” And David was certainly set apart from his brothers. We aren't sure what his brothers were doing, but they probably had careers on Wall Street, Capitol Hill, or in the military. Typical careers of

¹⁰ Vedantam, *ibid.*

kings and leaders. We do kind of have tunnel vision for the types of experiences and qualifications that a leader must have.

God's vision was different – then, and perhaps, now too. David was set apart, literally – set apart from the home, out in the fields. But he was also set apart by virtue of the fact that he was a shepherd – one who watched and protected sheep, a humble yet important job. And he was set apart by the fact that he was a musician – he played the lyre and sang.

God's vision for a new leader for Israel came through a rough-around-the-edges, creative shepherd and not through a seasoned, polished politician.

One of the most well-known artists for distorting traditional perspective was Pablo Picasso. He said, *“There are painters who transform the sun into a yellow spot, but there are others who, thanks to their art and intelligence, transform a yellow spot into the sun.”* Indeed, artists have the gift of taking a blank canvas, or a yellow spot, and creating a truth or beauty beyond what merely meets the eye.

In the beginning God *created* the world...God set the Table. God is the ultimate artist and host and visionary. God makes yellow dots into suns and singing shepherd boys into kings.

And here's the thing: David is no moral saint. But God sees not only the full depths of the human heart; God also sees a greater vision for each of us than we see for ourselves. God is passionate about our potential, not our past. This is where Psalm 51 comes in, though David had just as many moral failings as Saul (if not more), he had a heart and a desire for repentance – to try, again and again, to see how God sees.

So often we might look at our lives and think, what do I have to offer? What can I give? I'm not that talented. I don't have that much money. But when we see from that scarcity mindset, we are not actually seeing how God sees. We're focusing on what we don't have instead of what is right before us, especially in a culture that tells that acquiring more and more is the secret to success. But the community of Christ tells us something different. We can be the ones that help each other

move from a scarcity mentality to a vision of the Table of Abundance. When all we can see is one way – when we have tunnel vision on our lives – sometimes all we need is someone to come beside us and take our blinders away – to give us some encouragement, to help us see something differently.

There is a reason we are here together at Calvary. There is so much expansive vision in community – in being the EYES of Christ to and for one another. When all I can see is not enough – you help me see more than enough. Like last night at Trunk or Treat when I ran out of cupcakes at the cupcake walk and didn't have enough to give out to some of the winners and Sarah Brooks said to me, "*You could always just give them candy.*" (Duh! Angela had TONS of candy; why didn't I think of that?) I know my cookie monster costume was obscuring my peripheral vision because I kept running into the side of the tent I was under, but I can't blame my scarcity thinking about cupcakes on my costume. That's all about mindset – about not having tunnel vision on just one thing – cupcakes – but seeing how there were many possibilities (i.e.

candies) right before my eyes. Thank Sarah.

And to top it off, when I made an announcement that we only had eight cupcakes left and so we'd be closing the cupcake walk early a child in a family standing nearby waiting to participate came over and said to me, "*Cookie Monster, we could make it last longer and not run out if we shared the cupcakes.*" Ah. Children are good at seeing things we adults do not, aren't they?

David, the singing shepherd, was also just a boy. A child. God chose someone with childlike vision – which Jesus spoke to often in the gospels – to perhaps help Israel (and us) see some things differently. What does it mean to choose a child as a king? What about our vision would be more expansive if we didn't just seek the expected answers to our problems but instead saw with the eyes of God, or, the eyes of a child, or, the eyes of an artist, a creative? Are we seeing things in limited ways just because that's how we've always seen them? Or is there a different way to see something? Or someone? Or a situation we're in?

Just as the people of Israel were seeking after the perfect king, Samuel and Jesse were seeking after the perfect son to fit the mold of what they thought a king should be. And that's why Jesse only presented seven of his sons. But Samuel didn't let the fact that he didn't find what he was seeking after immediately keep him in a scarcity mentality. He asked, Jesse, are there more? More sons?

And in fact there was! One son. Not bunches, but just one. Sometimes abundance isn't measured in quantity but in quality.

Do you SEEK abundance and possibility only in what is directly before you OR do you SEE that there may be more than meets your immediate eye...out in the fields perhaps...on the periphery?

Had Samuel not allowed God's vision to guide his own, he might have just moved on to another family – seeking another Saul-like King, when the King he needed to see was in his peripheral vision already.

The story of Samuel anointing David is about God reframing and refracting how we see

things, and people, and the world. Indeed – how we see the abundance of blessings and resources around us...because we tend to seek after that which we do not have before we stop and see if what we need is right before us.

Do you SEEK abundance in the things you do not yet have? Or, do you SEE abundance in the things you already have?

It's the difference of one letter, but that one letter just might make all the difference.

Amen.