

Sermon for Youth Day and Father's Day

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost 16 June 2024

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Readings

1 Samuel 15: 34 – 16: 13

Psalms 20

2 Corinthians 5: 6-17

Mark 4: 26-34

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen

The Lord be with you.

Today we are celebrating two important occasions: Youth Day and Father's Day. Our readings from 1 Samuel, Psalms, 2 Corinthians, and Mark provide profound insights into God's kingdom and His plans for us. They remind us of the mysterious and powerful ways of how God's kingdom grows and how He chooses us, usually starting with the least expected. And so as I was reflecting on these readings the last 2 weeks I tried to explore how they speak to the youth in our community and the fathers who guide them.

The first reading from 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13 provides us with profound insights into God's ways and how his choices are usually very unexpected. In the story we learn about David's anointing. David's anointing highlights how God sees beyond people's outward appearances and societal expectations to choose who He deems as fit for His purpose. Just because a person is tall, handsome and strong, doesn't mean that they will automatically be chosen. In today's society we would call David the underdog, the one who is insignificant but has all the potential to be a great king. And how often do we as people as parents and teachers or leaders ignore the little ones, the young ones, the quiet ones, the last borns, because we consider them as insignificant, weak or incapable based on their outward appearance?

In verse 7, Samuel is convinced that Jesse's first born Eliab is the chosen one because of his appearance and God says something very profound, He says **"Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart"**

This is especially important for our youth. In a world that often values physical appearance, social status, and outward achievements, God reminds us that He values the heart—the inner character and faith of a person. Young people, regardless of their background or how society perceives them, hold immense value in God's eyes. I am always reminded about Jesus on youth day. Our role model is basically a 33 year old young man who changed the cause of human history and remains a significant figure in today's world. Back to the story

David's story should be particularly inspiring for all those who feel overlooked or undervalued. As the youngest son, he was not even considered by his father to be the anointed one of his sons. Can you imagine how embarrassed Jesse might have felt when Samuel said David was actually the anointed one? And we see this so often in our society where fathers often rely on the oldest children without considering the youngest ones to, for example, take over family businesses, to take care of the family and so on. And sometimes the oldest children are usually the most unreliable and problematic. We can even relate this to ourselves as Christians, none of us feel worthy of God's love, grace or forgiveness. Most times we feel insignificant. And yet God chooses us again and again. So this is a reminder for all of us but mostly to the children and young people that God sees and values you, even when others might overlook you. This should encourage you to trust in God's plan and timing, knowing that He has a purpose for you. For fathers and mentors, this story is a call to recognise and nurture the unique gifts and potential in your children (all your children), even when they might not seem obvious. As well as a reminder for you to reflect God's steadfast love and continuous support for your children.

This beautifully leads us to Paul's letter to the Corinthians which challenges us to look beyond the physical and transient and focus on the spiritual and the eternal. In verses 6-7 Paul begins by reminding the Corinthians that **"we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For we live by faith, not by sight"**. This statement is a cornerstone of our Christian life, emphasising that our journey is guided by faith in God's promises rather than by what we can see and touch.

For our youth and for many of us this is an important lesson. Today, young people often face uncertainties and challenges that can make the future seem daunting. The world places a high value on tangible achievements and visible success, which can lead to anxiety and self-doubt and we see this in the increase rates of suicide by young people, especially young men. However, Paul's words remind us that true confidence comes from faith in God's plan, even when it's not immediately visible. It encourages us to trust that God is working in our lives in ways that may not be evident now but will ultimately lead to fulfilment and purpose.

In verse 17, Paul then goes on to say **"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all"**. He encourages us not to focus on things that are seen because those are temporary, he instead calls us to focus on what is unseen as this is eternal. He essentially calls us to invest our energy and passion in things that have eternal value like, prayer, peace, love and faith understanding that our actions and choices have a lasting impact. And so for us who lead, this is a reminder to guide our children towards values and goals that transcend the immediate and the material and to encourage them to cultivate visions for their lives that align with God's eternal purposes. This means calling our children, young people and others to be made new in Christ. As Paul says **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"**

This is a message of hope and empowerment. It tells them that no matter their past, their mistakes, or their perceived limitations, they have a new identity and purpose in Christ. They are not defined by their failures or the labels that others may place on them. This new creation is a call to live out their true potential, knowing they are loved and valued by God. This highlights the importance of nurturing the

spiritual growth of our children and young people. And we are actively doing this with the mentorship plan that we have developed for the children, where we have paired an adult with a child to journey with them through their spiritual life. We hope to be instruments of God's transformation in the lives of the children we will be mentoring, encouraging them to embrace their identity in Christ and walk confidently in the new life He offers. A reminder that the most important legacy we can leave is one of faith and spiritual integrity.

What we hope to achieve with this mentorship plan is create ambassadors of Christ in the young people, for them to spread their message of reconciliation and hope to their friends and the world around them. During the Alpha Course we have heard about how young people are confidently and comfortably speaking about God and their faith with their friends. Although we still need to work on the values of forgiveness, compassion and peace making not only for our children and young people but for ourselves as well, we can definitely all help each other in becoming instruments of God's reconciliation in this broken world.

All this leads us in growing God's kingdom which brings us to the Gospel reading for today which beautifully ties up all our readings and themes.

Mark's gospel readings highlights how God's work often begins in ways that seem very small and insignificant, and yet grows beyond our expectations. The first parable tells a story about a farmer who scatters seed on the ground and they all start growing without the farmer having done anything to them. And they just grow without him knowing how and so the growth happens mysteriously and automatically, resulting in a harvest.

For our youth, this parable is a reminder that your efforts, though they may seem small and unnoticed, have the potential to yield great results in God's timing. Young people often face pressure to see immediate results and tangible successes "instant gratification". And so this parable encourages you to trust in God's process, to be patient, and to believe that your faith and actions, though small, are part of a larger plan that God is orchestrating.

For fathers, this parable underscores the importance of nurturing and guiding your children with patience and faith. Just as the farmer trusts the natural process of growth, you are called to trust that your efforts to instill values, faith, and character in your children will bear fruit in time. This requires patience and faith, recognising that growth and maturity often happen beneath the surface, out of immediate view.

The second parable about the mustard seed illustrates the surprising growth of God's Kingdom. Last year Rev Karen gave all the children a mustard seed during her sermon of the mustard seed and I'm sure we can all remember how tiny it is and yet how big it grows. It grows so big that it even provides shelter for the birds.

For our young people, this parable is a powerful message about your potential. I know sometimes you may feel insignificant or overlooked, but God sees your potential and can use you in mighty ways. Like today, without you guys, this service was not going to be possible, we wouldn't have servers at the altar, we wouldn't have Sunday School or Youth which would honestly make our church BORING. But even at home,

I'm sure your parents would be so lonely and miserable without you guys. They MUST appreciate you. And so, this should encourage you to have faith in your abilities and in God's plan for your lives. You should be reminded that even the smallest acts of kindness, faith, and service can grow into something significant and impactful.

For fathers, this parable is a reminder of the importance of the small, daily acts of love and guidance that you provide to and for your children. These may seem insignificant at times, but they contribute to the growth and development of your children. Please be encouraged to recognise the power of your influence and to continue sowing seeds of faith and love, trusting that God will bring about growth and transformation not only in the lives of the children but the whole church.

Both parables highlight the mysterious nature of God's Kingdom. The growth of the seed and the transformation of the mustard seed into a large plant happen in ways that are beyond human understanding. This calls all of us to embrace a life of faith and patience. This means trusting in God's unseen work in our lives and in the world around us. It is an invitation to live by faith, not by sight, and to believe that God is at work even when we cannot see the results immediately. This also means being patient and faithful in our role as nurturers and guides. It calls us to trust that God is working through our efforts, even when progress seems slow or imperceptible. We are encouraged to be steady and faithful, knowing that our role is crucial in God's plan for our lives.

I of course cannot end without a call to action. And so as we celebrate Youth Day and Father's Day, let these reflections inspire us to take meaningful action in our lives and communities.

#### For the Youth

- **Embrace Your Potential:** Believe that God sees your heart and has chosen you for great things. Trust in His timing and continue to grow in faith and character.
- **Live by Faith:** Step out in faith, even when the path is unclear. Trust that God is working in and through you, and that your efforts, no matter how small, are valuable in His Kingdom.
- **Seek God's Guidance:** Regularly pray and seek God's guidance in your decisions and actions. Let His word be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path.

#### For Fathers

- **Nurture and Guide:** Please be patient and faithful in nurturing your children. Recognise and celebrate their unique potential, even when it is not immediately visible.
- **Lead by Example:** Demonstrate a life of faith and transformation. Let your actions and decisions reflect your commitment to God, serving as a model for your children to follow.
- **Trust in God's Process:** Trust that your efforts in raising and guiding your children are part of God's larger plan. Be patient and faithful, knowing that God will bring about growth and transformation in His time.

#### For the Congregation

- **Support the Youth and Fathers:** Encourage and support the youth and fathers in your community. Create environments where they can grow, share, and learn from one another.

- **Celebrate Together:** Use occasions like Youth Day and Father's Day to celebrate the contributions of young people and fathers. Acknowledge their efforts and encourage them to continue in their journeys of faith.
- **Most importantly Pray and Intercede:** Commit to praying for the youth and fathers in our congregation and community. Ask for God's guidance, protection, and blessings over their lives.

Finally, let us remember that God's choices often defy our expectations, as seen in David's anointing from 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13, reaffirming that He looks at the heart, not the outward appearance. Let us embrace the new creation we are in Christ, as Paul encourages in 2 Corinthians 5:6-17, living by faith and not by sight, knowing that our lives are part of God's grand tapestry. And let us find hope and assurance in the mysterious growth of God's Kingdom, illustrated in Mark 4:26-34, trusting that even our smallest acts of faith will be transformed by God's power into something magnificent. So, step boldly into God's plan for your life, sowing seeds of faith, living as new creations, and witnessing the miraculous growth of His Kingdom.

I would like to end with verses 1-5 of the Psalm

Psalm 20

1. May the Lord hear you in the day of trouble: the God of Jacob lift you up to safety.
2. May he send you his help from the sanctuary and be your strong support from Zion
3. May he remember all your offerings and accept with favour your burnt sacrifices,
4. Grant you your heart's desire and fulfil all your purposes
5. May we also rejoice in your victory and triumph in the name of our God the Lord perform all your petitions.

Amen.