

Green Hill Presbyterian Church  
“Love Your Heart”  
Thomas G. Speers, III  
Ordinary 11—June 17, 2018

Lessons: 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13; Mark 4:26-34

There is a song that one of the singing groups at Ethel Walker School used to sing on occasion that has moved me deeply. Part of the reason may be that it is sung by a wonderful group of high school girls, but much more are the words that usually bring a tear to my eye. The words are:

How could anyone ever tell you  
You were anything less than beautiful?  
How could anyone ever tell you  
You were less than whole?  
How could anyone fail to notice  
That your loving is a miracle?  
How deeply you're connected to my soul?<sup>1</sup>

The song was written by Libby Roderick more than twenty years ago and she has recorded it and played in all kinds of famous places for famous people.

How could anyone ever tell you you were anything less than beautiful? But of course part of the reason the song resonates is that all kinds of people do tell us that we are less than beautiful and less than whole. We've told that to people of color and we've told that to people who are sick. We've told this to immigrants and people who seem different. We've told it to people who don't seem to measure up to some artificial barometer of what beautiful is. We have a long history of believing those who look only at the outside of a person and fail to see the ability and beauty and wisdom and courage and integrity and love that are deep inside.

Sometimes the voice that tells us we are less than beautiful is our own voice.

Last week Jennifer Finney Boylan wrote an article about sadness and depression. She begins: “I stood on stage as an audience of over a thousand people applauded and cheered. My hosts placed an award in my hands. I nodded to the crowd, and they all rose to their feet. Hooray for you, the strangers shouted. Hooray!

“Less than a week later, I sat up in bed in my house in Maine. A voice said: ‘You're nothing. You're a joke. They'd never have given you that award if they knew the truth.’

“It was hard to argue. After all, who knew me better than the voice inside my head?

“As it turns out, the person who knows me better than that voice is me. That is what depression does: It lies to you. At this point in my life, I'm stronger than it is. But if I were younger—or the voice were louder—things might be different.”<sup>2</sup> Sometimes the voice that tells us we are less than beautiful comes from the inside.

This problem of shallow vision is as old as humanity. Samuel the prophet was sent by God to anoint a new leader to follow King Saul. Saul had become a disappointment. He had failed to follow as God had led and so God sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint one of the sons of Jesse. Jesse brought his sons forward, showing them off as a good proud parent might do. Samuel looked at Eliab, the eldest son of Jesse, and thought that surely this was the Lord's anointed. 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

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<sup>1</sup> Libby Roderick, *How Could Anyone*. © 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Finney Boylan, *What Is Sadness, and What Is Depression?*, *The New York Times*, June 13, 2018.

Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” Seven sons pass by Samuel, and not one is the one chosen by God to be king. So Samuel in frustration asks, “Are all your sons here?” Jesse explains, somewhat incredulously, that there is another boy, the youngest, but he is out with the sheep. He couldn’t possibly be the one Samuel wants. He is too young. He is too little. He doesn’t have enough experience. He doesn’t look the part. Yet of course David is just the one whom God has called, because, again, God does not see as mortals see, they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. David is a great thing found is a surprising package, and his greatness is not be found in what he has done; it is not to be found in his stature; it is not to be found in his birth order; nor is it to be found in his ruddy complexion, his beautiful eyes or his handsome features. His greatness comes from God who gives him all that he needs. From that day forward, God’s spirit came mightily upon him.

Like Samuel, we continue to look on outward appearance. I make quick judgments about others based on that outward appearance all too often, and I know that I’m not the only one who does that. As a society we spend large sums of money on our outward appearance, whether in clothes, or for diets, or cosmetics, and these are not necessarily bad, but far more important is what is found inside. James Newsome writes: “The various ways in which men and women in our and every age are tempted to [look upon the outward appearance instead of the heart] can be documented in our racism, our sexism, and our various forms of idolatry (love of money, clothing, glitzy automobiles, and the like). It is only when we learn to see beyond that which is most visible that we begin to assess people in terms of their character and commitments.”<sup>3</sup>

Across too many years, one people in this country were enslaved and oppressed based on outward appearance. The fruit of that injustice is of course still felt today. Yet in the midst of that oppression, much like our ancestors in Egypt, people had an understanding of their worth. They refused to believe the lie that they were less than fully human. Their example continues to inspire oppressed and suffering people in the world today. Listen to the words of Toni Morrison, spoken through her character Baby Suggs, the matriarch in Morrison’s book, *Beloved*. They are words that speak to a people who know about oppression, who know about being judged on their outward appearance, and they can to speak to all of us today, especially in those times when we have trouble seeing or believing our God given worth.

“Here, . . . in this place, we flesh; Flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it, love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don’t love your eyes; they’d just as soon pick ’em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them, touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face, ‘cause they don’t love that either. You got to love it, You! And no, they ain’t in love with your mouth. . . . You got to love it. This is flesh that I’m talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance, backs that need support; shoulders that need strong arms. . . . More than eyes and feet. More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize.”<sup>4</sup>

God does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. Love that heart. Don’t let anyone ever tell you you are anything less than beautiful.

In a world that too often puts people down because of their outward appearance, look inward,

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<sup>3</sup> James D. Newsome, *Texts for Preaching, A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV- Year B, Proper 6, Ordinary Time 11*. Westminster/John Knox Press © 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Toni Morrison, *Beloved*. Alfred A. Knopf © 1987.

and love your heart, so that God's Spirit might also come mightily on you.

Let us pray: Loving and life-giving God, take us, small as we sometimes feel, and make something great of us, that we might be your faithful people in this hurting world. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.