

**Call to Worship**

As we begin our worship these words are for thinking: 'Chosen, not by order of age or rank, or wealth, or power. Chosen, simply, for God loves all humanity with equal attachment. In God's eyes all are beautiful, reflecting the complexion of God. Today we worship God as those who know the precious gift of being chosen and loved by the One who is Lord of all.'

**Hymn CH4 63 – All people that on earth do dwell**

**Prayer of Adoration & Praise**

We clear our heads, we still our hearts and we come before God in prayer, let us pray.

Loving God, we come before you, in our homes, in our church buildings as one united people, joined together in love, in faith, and in the hope: that your grace will carry us through the trials and tribulations of our lives; that your love will look through our outward façade to the truth within; that your wisdom will guide us as we seek to live lives of purpose in service of you, your people, your church, and your creation.

As we seek to hear your voice, as we try to discern your message, we lay before you our true selves: all that we are, all that we have, all that we have done, all that we have not done.

Speak into our lives. Speak into our fears. Speak into our hopes. Speak into our doubts. Speak into our wonder. Speak into our loneliness. Speak into our joy. Speak into our brokenness. Speak into our hopefulness. Loving God, speak into our lives and lead us towards you, towards each other, and towards your everlasting kingdom

For all this we ask in Jesus' name, who taught us when we pray together to say; Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others that sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and

deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

### **Theme Introduction: 'Choices'**

### **Hymn CH4 193 – God is love, his the care**

### **Reading: 1 Samuel 16: 1 – 13**

#### **David Is Anointed King**

**16** The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you go on grieving over Saul? I have rejected him as king of Israel. But now get some olive oil and go to Bethlehem, to a man named Jesse, because I have chosen one of his sons to be king."

<sup>2</sup> "How can I do that?" Samuel asked. "If Saul hears about it, he will kill me!" The Lord answered, "Take a calf with you and say that you are there to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will tell you what to do. You will anoint as king the man I tell you to."

<sup>4</sup> Samuel did what the Lord told him to do and went to Bethlehem, where the city leaders came trembling to meet him and asked, "Is this a peaceful visit, seer?"

<sup>5</sup> "Yes," he answered. "I have come to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. Purify yourselves and come with me." He also told Jesse and his sons to purify themselves, and he invited them to the sacrifice.

<sup>6</sup> When they arrived, Samuel saw Jesse's son Eliab and said to himself, "This man standing here in the Lord's presence is surely the one he has chosen." <sup>7</sup> But the Lord said to him, "Pay no attention to how tall and handsome he is. I have rejected him, because I do not judge as people judge. They look at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart."

<sup>8</sup> Then Jesse called his son Abinadab and brought him to Samuel. But Samuel said, "No, the Lord hasn't chosen him either." <sup>9</sup> Jesse then brought Shammah.

“No, the Lord hasn't chosen him either,” Samuel said.<sup>10</sup> In this way Jesse brought seven of his sons to Samuel. And Samuel said to him, “No, the Lord hasn't chosen any of these.”<sup>11</sup> Then he asked him, “Do you have any more sons?”

Jesse answered, “There is still the youngest, but he is out taking care of the sheep.”

“Tell him to come here,” Samuel said. “We won't offer the sacrifice until he comes.”<sup>12</sup> So Jesse sent for him. He was a handsome, healthy young man, and his eyes sparkled. The Lord said to Samuel, “This is the one—anoint him!”<sup>13</sup> Samuel took the olive oil and anointed David in front of his brothers. Immediately the spirit of the Lord took control of David and was with him from that day on. Then Samuel returned to Ramah.

#### **Hymn CH4 619/620 – Spirit of the Living God,**

#### **Sermon – ‘Do Not Label Me!’**

Labels. I wonder do you like labels. I like labels that have best before dates on them... They make my life a little bit easier. Labels. Most of us like labels. If a label on a jar said contains poison, it quickly saves someone's life. If it says gluten-free, dairy free or vegan, it helps some with health conditions make suitable choices. In this way labels are good things.

Yet, for every positive, you can, usually find a negative. So, what could possibly be wrong with labels. Well, it is this, you and I like to place labels on other people. We cannot help ourselves. ‘Too fat’, ‘too skinny’, ‘too lazy’, ‘too busy’, ‘too miserable’, ‘too happy’, ‘too full of themselves’, ‘too churchy’, ‘not churchy enough’, ‘too casually dressed’, ‘too smartly dressed’, ‘not good enough for my son’, ‘not good enough for my daughter’, ‘she would make a great minister, whilst him over there... well...’

We cannot help ourselves. Let me give you an example. Before ministry, I worked as a manager for a high street retailer. I was one of “the gang”, nights out, a quick pint, included in everything. Yet, when I shared that I was leaving

retail for the Church of Scotland, the label the others had put on me was ripped off and replaced with another. I found it totally bizarre, and I still do.

I can be sat in a room with friends and strangers, and when those I do not know, ask what I do for a living, and I say that I'm a 'Church of Scotland minister', they will spend the next 10 minutes apologising for something they might or might not have said. Right, enough about me, I share that to show how strange it is that we quickly label others and then behave according to our own understanding of that label.

Our Old Testament reading from 1 Samuel deals with exactly this today. For as you look at King David's life, you can see on several different occasions that his story cries out 'Don't Label Me!' For in this sense labels are dangerous as they reduce people to no more than objects.

So, let us encounter David for the first time and see how he is chosen to be the next King of Israel. Since we last spoke about a King for Israel at the beginning of June, the Israelites have appointed Saul as their first king. Saul was a tall, strong warrior type. However, he was a bad King with a bad attitude and so God determined that Israel needed a new king.

It is at this point that we pick up the story. God said to Samuel: *'How long will you go on grieving over Saul? I have rejected him as king of Israel. But now get some olive oil and go to Bethlehem, to a man named Jesse, because I have chosen one of his sons to be king.'*

Bethlehem. Not many people's first choice of a place to find a king. Normally, a high position like this would go to the first-born son, of a prominent man in Jerusalem, would it not? Jesse is a small-time farmer, in a small-time town, isn't he?

Yet, Samuel arrives at Jesse's house and Jesse lines up his seven sons. Samuel looks the first son up and down and says: *"This man standing here in the Lord's presence is surely the one he has chosen."* <sup>7</sup> But the Lord said to him, *'Pay no attention to how tall and handsome he is. I have rejected him, because I do not*

*judge as people judge. They look at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart.”*

When Samuel looked at Eliab, Samuel saw a picture of what he thought a king should look like. In our minds, when we label people, we reduce them to the objects that will serve a particular purpose in our lives.

Some labels are useful: you are a teacher; you will teach my child. You are a surgeon; you will fix my broken arm. You are an electrician; you will fix my faulty light.

Some labels work like this: you are pretty; you make me feel good. You are popular; you will make me look good. You are powerful; you will help me get what I want.

Other labels work like this: you are lazy, you do not deserve my help. You are different, you should be excluded. You are the enemy; you must be eliminated.

Samuel saw Eliab, who was tall and handsome and applied his own label: ‘you will make a brilliant king!’ What is consistent with all these labels is that each person is reduced to an object that can be used and manipulated. David’s story continues and we see another dangerous thing about labels. For labels are static, but people are always changing.

David defied all the labels that Samuel had for a king. Jesse had his first seven sons stand before Samuel. Samuel went through them all and then asked, ‘*Do you have any more sons?*’ ‘Well,’ Jesse replied as he scratched his head, ‘there is one more, my youngest is out in the fields, looking after my sheep.’ ‘I’ll wait’, Samuel replied, and so this young shepherd boy called David, was sent for.

When David arrived, he wasn’t exactly what Samuel was expecting and yet we know that David is the one who defeated Goliath. When we study David’s life, we see him start out as a young, energetic, courageous, righteous young man, who was able to defeat the warrior Goliath with a sling shot. David is a humble man and even though he knows that God has chosen him, he will not rebel

against King Saul or force himself upon the throne. David becomes a mighty leader who leads his people into victory and peace. If you were to take a picture of David at this very moment and label him, what would you write? Humble? Courageous? Godly?

As David's story continues, this same man looks out across the courtyard one day and sees a beautiful woman. She is married to the captain of David's army. That does not stop David. He seduces her, she becomes pregnant, and David has her husband murdered. How would you label David now? Adulterer? Murderer? Sinner?

Later, when you have a spare moment, why not read Psalm 51, which David wrote after he had been caught for what he did to Bathsheba. How would you label David now? Repentant? Caught? Two-faced? Authentic?

Once again, we come across the fact that labels are static. They are single snapshots that only tell one small piece of a large, unfolding process, that is taking place in a person's life. Furthermore, labels are always on the surface, but the truth is found in a person's heart. Remember what God said to Samuel whilst Samuel was admiring Eliab: *'I do not judge as people judge. They look at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart.'*

These words of God were also followed by Jesus. Jesus encountered all sorts of people. Rich and poor. Healthy and ill. Inquisitive and not interested. Yet, with each person He saw, Jesus looked beyond the outward appearance and at the person's heart. Can we say we do the same?

When we read about Jesus in the Gospels, it is easy to label Him, as a homeless, itinerant preacher. A man Who was considered a 'lawbreaker' by the influential people in society. If that type of person were to come to our church, how would we receive them? I often wonder if Jesus returned next Sunday, would He be allowed in most churches? Would he be too smelly, too different from our accepted normal?

So, what are we to do about this? How do we stop 'labelling' others, when labels are so much easier to do and to apply to others? The beginning of the solution can be seen in our reading from 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel. The way to stop labelling is to stop looking and start listening. Listen to what God has to say to us. Listen for God's plan and not ours. Can we honestly say that we listen for God's voice before we make our own judgement on others? I do not think we can... certainly not one hundred percent of the time.

It took a while, but Samuel eventually got there. Samuel came to realise that listening is at the heart of God. As we step out into a new week, as we encounter others, could we try to not look at what is on the surface. Could we try not to label those whom we meet and if we meet someone we have already labelled, may we be willing to rip that label off and bin it. Instead, may each one of us try to listen to what the person is saying, or listen to what God might be saying. You never know, you just might be talking to the next King?

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Hymn CH4 501 – Take this moment, sign, and space**

**Prayer for Ourselves and Others**

We unite our hearts again in prayer, let us pray.

Gracious God, as we gather in praise, separated but united in love and community, we ask for your continued sustenance of this church, this community, locally and globally: the body of Christ; that we might continue to serve you, each other, and the mission and ministry to which we have each been called in our own unique way. We ask for the strength to see and to plan, to invigorate and to change, to cast off where needed, and to cherish where warranted.

As we face continued problems as a community, a society, a country, and a world, we ask for your love and peace, to take root in our hearts, and in the hearts of all, friend and foe, to give us the patience to see the good in humanity. We ask for wisdom to be given to all those who seek to lead us in this country

and beyond, that in this year of change, they will work for the good of all people and not for the love of power.

As we bear witness to the pain of this world, we ask for your guiding, healing hand, we pray for all who look out at a world of rejection fear, loss, poverty and illness, we pray for all those marginalised through their class, sexuality, education, gender, finances, race, geography, or beliefs. We pray for all those who are judged or stigmatised, and we ask for the boldness to cause hope in a world sorely needing it, this day and every day. Amen.

**Hymn CH4 184 – Sing to the Lord a joyful song,**

**Benediction**

God of potential, God, who seeks, and finds, and chooses, God, who sees beyond the surface to the heart of all, you have chosen us to be your people.

As we leave this time and space help us to look at the world with your eyes: help us to see opportunities, not obstacles, possibilities and promise in unexpected people and places— may we so build up others, that we build your kin-dom of heaven on earth.

So, may the Blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Spirit rest upon you and all whom you love this day and always. Amen.