

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

March 15, 2026 – FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT, YR. A

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Sermon: “*Look on the Heart*”

1 Samuel 16:1-13	(The Lord looks on the heart, not the appearance)
Psalms 23	(The Lord is our Shepherd and cares for us)
Ephesians 5:8-14	(We are to live as children of the Light)
St. John 9:1-41	(Jesus heals a man who was born blind)

Two seriously ill men occupied the same hospital room. The man in the bed by the window was allowed to sit up for about an hour each day to help drain fluid from his lungs. The other was required to lay flat on his back after surgery. During their days together, the two men became friends. They talked extensively about their families, their careers, and their past experiences. During the hour or so that the one man was allowed to sit up, he would describe for his friend all that could be seen outside the window.

One day, he described the unfolding beauty of Spring as the flowers outdoors blossomed into radiant colors. Another day, he talked about the parade that was passing by on the street below. He described it in such exquisite detail that his friend could almost hear the trumpets playing and the drums keeping the beat. Although the man confined to bed could not see these things, he could at least imagine them. And they gave him a sense of comfort and hope.

Late one night, the patient by the window passed away. The other man was brokenhearted. How he would miss his friend. And how he would miss the description of the world beyond the window. The next day, the man asked if his bed could be moved next to the window. The nurses agreed, and a short time later, the other hospital bed was rolled away and his was rolled into place. Then the nurses left and he was alone.

Slowly, painfully, the patient raised himself up on one elbow to gaze outside. At last, he would get to see the world's beauty for himself with his own eyes. Higher and higher he lifted himself until his head raised above the window sill and his eyes caught sight ... of nothing. The window faced the brick wall of another building!

The man called the nurse and asked how this could be. He told her about the parade, and the flowers bursting into colorful life. Why would his friend make up such things? The nurse shrugged her shoulders and said she didn't know. Maybe just to cheer him up and make him feel better. But what she told him next was stranger still: the other man was ... *blind!*

Blessed are those who see what the rest of us do not.* That's not a Bible verse, but it does represent one of the great truths of Scripture. The life of faith, the character of belief, the practice of spirituality, all require us to perceive things other people don't see. And this requirement is bolstered by the fact that God looks at life differently than *we* do. “*My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways,*” the prophet Isaiah (55:8) recorded the Lord saying. God looks at life differently than we do.

In today's Old Testament story, Samuel the prophet is sent to Bethlehem to select a new king for Israel. Saul, the current king, is in trouble. According to the latest CNN/New York Times poll, his favorability rating is *down* and his unfavorable rating is *up*. This is based upon a telephone interview with just one respondent—*God*. And this poll has *no margin of error*. Saul is definitely on his way out.

So God sends Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint a new king. The prophet thinks this is a strange place to look for a king. After all, Bethlehem is a tiny little village inhabited by the smallest tribe of all the tribes of Israel. But then, God looks at things differently than we do. So Samuel goes to Bethlehem, to the house of a fellow named Jesse. God says one of Jesse's sons will be the man. That night, there's a pot-luck supper at the church. While Samuel pours drinks for each one coming through the buffet line, he notices Jesse and his sons.

The first one is Eliab. Tall. Strong. The eldest of Jesse's sons which means, of course, that according to the Law he is set aside to serve the Lord. Eliab is prominent in local politics. He holds all the right positions on taxes, education, and the economy. Surely, *this is the one*, Samuel thinks! But the Lord says, "No."

The next one coming along the buffet line is Abinadab. Handsome. Calm. Capable. Abinadab's plate is virtually empty because he will not eat meat, and has a reverence for all of life including plants and trees. He wears a button that reads, "*I invented the Internet*" and entertains children by dancing *the Macarena*. Surely, God must have chosen this one. But the Lord says, "No." Then comes Shammah. A Rhodes scholar. Former pro-basketball player. Bright. Articulate. "No!" says the Lord. "*Not this one either.*" And so the seven sons of Jesse pass through the line. The one with the red plaid shirt and the cowboy hat. The one who ran the Red Cross. Even the one who's great with camels. "*Nope. Nope. Nope.*" says the Lord as they pass by.

God looks at things differently than we do. "Are these all your sons, Jesse?" Samuel asks. "Well, no. The youngest is out watching the sheep." "Send for him," says Samuel. A short time later, David comes in. No credentials. No experience. Just real handsome! A magazine cover guy. And God says, "*Bingo! That's the one!*"

God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are God's ways our ways. One of the most difficult challenges we ever face as Christians is to acknowledge that most of how you and I look at life is not even close to how God sees things. Or, as we read in the key verse in 1 Samuel 16: "*The Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.*"

God is not talking here about looking at a person's heart in the sense that we might try to see and understand their inner motives and good intentions. Too often people trivialize this issue of the heart. But today, I invite you to think of this from another perspective. That is, that God looks upon people and events from the perspective of what He is quietly, lovingly, and powerfully doing in the background. To look on the heart, *is to perceive what God is doing in the inner life of a person or a moment.*

Although the seven sons of Jesse looked great to Samuel and had all the right qualifications, it was the eighth son upon whom God had placed His Spirit, and within whom God was working to shape a king. Samuel couldn't see it at first, but God taught him a new skill of looking on the heart. Blessed are those who see what the rest of us do not.

How do *we* begin to look on the heart of those we encounter? First, when we look at other people, we must try to understand that God *wants to be* present and at work within them. Every human being has a component within that is a divine work-in-progress, whether or not that person ever recognizes it or nourishes it. Some never do. Other do so, gradually. For instance, what we witnessed in the movie *Schindler's List*. The film tells the true story of Oskar Schindler—a businessman, a Nazi, and a not very-nice character. Yet, as the Holocaust takes place all around him, Schindler senses a stirring within his soul.

Something deep and long-hidden begins to influence his decisions. He begins to use his money and his business acumen to save Jews from the death camps. The product of his factory becomes not so much war material as it is salvation. Over one thousand Jews were saved by Oskar Schindler. And when the war is over, Schindler is presented with a beautiful humanitarian award. As he looks at the medal, he calculates its worth. And then he begins to weep as he realizes how many more human beings could have been saved if he'd had that award to sell. No longer does he see life in terms of material wealth. Everything is now measured by the value of saving others.

Second, if you can believe it, the same divine power may be at work in the life of the person you disdain, the person you don't agree with, the person whose life is far different than yours, the person who is your friend, the person who is your enemy, the person whose lifestyle makes you cringe. God looks upon the heart and all that He is doing within it.

Will you ask God to help you see, that, too? And if you *can* perceive God-at-work in the lives of others, begin to support God's efforts. Work at affirming God's presence and seek to empower others to recognize it within themselves. Moreover, be on the lookout for *eighth children*. The ones who don't fit in. The ones who are not in the mainstream. The ones nobody else likes. The ones people don't listen to. The ones disenfranchised from the benefits everyone else receives.

God seems to have a special place in His heart for people on the fringes. And, although you and I may prefer to associate with those in the top seven, it's often the *eighth child* in whom God is truly at work. So look for *the eighth child* and stick up for them! Finally, hallow—that is, treat as holy—even the darkest moments of life. For in those God is working to bring about light and goodness.

As Jesus drew near to Jerusalem so long ago, those who managed His career thought He could maximize God's work by living larger. Some wanted Him to do an interview with Oprah. Others felt He should write a book. Some brought up the idea of a cable TV show. Others urged Him to build a big church. People saw Jesus' ministry in lots of different ways. But people look at the outside. God looks on the heart.

So as the disciples paraded these options before God, just like Jesse paraded his seven sons, God said "no" to Oprah. "No" to a book. "No" to cable TV. "No" to a mega-church. After all these popular opportunities were exhausted, God asked the disciples, "Are there no more options left?" When they answered, "Well yes, there is one more. That old rugged Cross up on Mount Calvary," God said, "*Bingo! That's the one.*"

Let us pray:

Dear God, help us to see that You make even the darkest moments light. Give us grace to look on the hearts of all whom we encounter and to discern how You are working in them. Help us to value the eighth child, and to experience every place as a holy one in which You are present and active. And may we be blessed to see what others do not. We ask this through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

* Adapt. Marty Singley, "Life from Another Angle," 21 March 2017, martysingley.com <<https://www.martysingley.com/life-another-angle/>> 7 March 2026.