

“Tired of Keeping Up Appearances?”

I Samuel 16:1-13

Series: Home for Christmas Week 2. Love: Longing for Home

The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hoglund

The Woodside Church

December 6, 2020

It’s dangerous to judge by appearances. In an Ameriquest commercial a man comes home to prepare a romantic dinner for his wife. With tomato sauce simmering on the stove, he chops vegetables with a large knife. Suddenly his cat knocks the pan of sauce onto the floor and then falls into the mess. Just as the man picks up his tomato-splattered cat, his wife opens the door. She sees him holding a cat dripping red in one hand and a large knife in the other. The commercial ends: “Don’t judge by appearances.”

People can be obsessed about their appearance. I don’t know about you, but one of the things I find most disturbing is having to see my face on all these zoom calls. Before Covid I would see my face in the morning when I shaved and that was more than enough. Now I have to come face to face with that old guy all day long.

I don’t think I’m alone in this. Lots of Americans go to great lengths to improve their image. The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS) reported there were 4.5 million cosmetic surgical and nonsurgical procedures in the United States in 2019. The total cost was more than 8 billion dollars. Many have multiple procedures. In the coupon magazine that comes in the mail there are ads for one-stop beauty shops where you can select from a menu of services. Regret that tattoo with your old girlfriend’s name? Let them rub it out. Worried about wrinkles? There is a coupon for Botox Tuesdays – only \$9.50 a shot. Call it the Burger King of Beauty where you get to “Have it Your Way.” Some years ago the president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons warns: “It gives people the false perception that they can be anybody they want to be.”¹

Why do we want to be someone else? There are multiple reasons:

- To attract someone.
- To impress and compete with our peers.
- To fight the natural process of aging.
- To make us feel good about ourselves.

It’s easy to change the outside. But we are fooling ourselves if we think this will change the inside. In our hearts we hunger for attention, affirmation and affection. In short, we hunger for love. We are told being beautiful on the outside is the best way to feel loved and valued on the inside. But it’s a lie. When actress Halle Barry was named one of People magazine’s 50 Most Beautiful People she said this about physical beauty:

Beauty? Let me tell you something, being thought of as "a beautiful woman" has spared me nothing in life, no heartache, no trouble. Love has been difficult.

¹ Michael Hastings, "Makeovers: Can I Get a Little Rhinoplasty with That?" Newsweek (12-22-03).

Beauty is essentially meaningless, and it is always transitory. I can't believe what people do to themselves [to make themselves look beautiful], the excess, and then they end up distorted. Worse, they still have that hole in their soul that led them to change themselves to begin with.²

A hole in the soul. Beneath the outer shell of beauty, there can be a great emptiness, like a golden Oscar statue that's hollow inside. Do you see the vicious cycle? A lack of love and worth inside drives us to make the outside looking more appealing. But that does not fill the void with the love or self worth we seek. We still feel empty. Surface beauty does not guarantee love, worth or happiness. This week in our Home for Christmas series we look at God's second gift: Love, a longing for Home. We receive this gift when we stop keeping up appearances and start uncovering what's below the surface.

Samuel feels depressed inside. As the last of Israel's Judges he is called to anoint and crown Saul as the first king of Israel. Saul is a handsome figure – a head taller than other Israelites. He immediately proves to be a capable leader. But then the darker side of Saul's empty soul shows through his heroic image. He is stubborn, impatient, deceptive, given to fits of rage and melancholy, easily swayed by his soldiers and disobedient to the Lord. What starts out so promising turns sour. Samuel and Saul eventually part ways.

Once more Samuel is called to lead Israel through a crisis. He still loves Saul and grieves for him. But the future of the nation will now rest in someone else's hands.

The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king" I Samuel 16:1.

When Samuel arrives in Bethlehem, he says to the town elders, "Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me" (v. 5). Now, each member of the community parades past the old Judge. Finally, the family of Jesse approaches.

When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" I Samuel 16: 6-7.

The next two, Abinadab and Shammah are also passed over by the Lord. In fact, the Lord turns down all seven sons. Samuel is confused. Jesse has run out of sons. The beauty pageant is over and no one is crowned. "Are these all the sons you have?" Samuel asks their father. "There is still the youngest," Jesse answers. "But he is tending the sheep." They think so little of the boy they didn't invite him to the sacrifice. "Send for him;" Samuel cries, "we will not sit down (to worship and eat) until he arrives" (v. 11).

² "Beauty's Beast," www.NewYorkPost.com.

Now the whole town waits while they search for the boy. Finally, in the same town square where last week Boaz proposed to Ruth, there appears a dirty, disheveled shepherd boy. His cheeks are flush from running in from the pasture. All eyes are on him.

Then, the Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; he is the one.” So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power (v. 12-13).

God doesn't look at the outside. He looks into the heart. He does not choose the next king because of size, strength, age, wisdom, education, battle experience or resume. He sees a beauty underneath all the appearances we put up. What does that mean for us?

The Lord doesn't judge by appearances. Neither should we. When we look at the outsides of others, we are often tempted to compete with them. We subtly compare ourselves to those around us. We evaluate a hundred features of their appearance and personality: height, weight, intelligence, strength, achievements, age, skin color and so on. Then we determine if we are superior or inferior to them.

Comparison and competition ruin relationships and cause us to feel dissatisfied with ourselves. Jill Briscoe speaks at Christian women's conferences. She recalls,

One day I had a speaking engagement in Florida and I shared a table with three elegant young women. I felt fat, forty, and somewhat futile. Suddenly and unexpectedly God inquired of me, "Why do you think everyone is so tense?" "Competition," I replied with sudden understanding. I distinctly heard his next words: "Jill, you don't need to compete." For the first time I thanked God for my ordinary looks. I could be a big sister to women, a friendly mother, an aunt. I could relax, knowing I would never threaten anyone. God had made me just right for my ministry of teaching women, and that was all that mattered.³

We don't need to fear others. We don't need to compete. A dear friend in this church mentioned to me some years ago that he was worried about attending his class reunion. "Why?" I asked. "I'm concerned there will be a lot of comparisons and boasting about accomplishments." So I made this suggestion. "Instead of comparing and competing with them, approach it as an opportunity to bless and encourage them." That's what he did and it changed his whole attitude toward his friends. God wants to bless and encourage you. He sees a beauty in you that is more than skin deep.

The Lord Sees into My Heart. Now that sounds comforting until I stop and think about what's in my heart. Jesus says,

What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person. Mark 7:20-23

³ Jill Briscoe, The Greatest Lesson I've Ever Learned. Today's Christian Woman, "Heart to Heart."

I can't fool God. He sees right past the carefully fashioned outer image I show to the world. He knows all the thoughts and desires which race and rage within. That's a frightening thought. How does all that stuff get into our hearts? Of course the Bible tells us we are infected with a deadly virus called sin. Yet sin needs something to work with. To really heal, we need to do some excavation to find out what is buried in the heart.

David probably faced a lot of troubles and traumas growing up. He was the youngest brother in the family, left to do the dirty work of caring for the sheep while the others went to party. Like Cinderella, he was not even invited.

I find many experience two types of traumas which fuel sinful behavior: Attacks and Lacks. Attacks are active trauma in which something is done to you while Lacks are passive trauma in which something was not done for you. Both types have three levels: High, Medium, and Low Intensity. In the Attack category High Intensity may be physical, emotional or sexual abuse, Medium is being bullied, rejected from the team, Low is being embarrassed or called a name. High Intensity in the Lack category may be abandonment by one or both parents, Medium includes never having close friends, being overlooked or taken for granted in the family, while Low is little appreciation or affection from parents. These traumatic experiences create blockages in the heart. You may know God unconditionally loves you. You may believe He forgives you and graciously accepts you as His child. Yet it's still hard to truly feel His love. Why? The Attacks and Lacks of Trauma block the way. When I stop trying to cover up all my sins with a good looking exterior, when I stop denying my traumas and get honest about them, when I ask God to help me clean out my heart, then healing and a new life can begin. I no longer need to please others in order to feel good about myself. God's Spirit comes upon me and lives in me just as it did in David. And that leads to the third truth.

The Lord Sees What My Heart Can Become in His Hands. What did the Lord see in David's heart that was not in his brothers or in Saul: a willingness to surrender his heart to the Lord. David places his life in God's hands. Listen to David's prayers:

- My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? Psalm 42:2
- Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Psalm 51:10
- May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:14

David knows he cannot fill the emptiness in his heart by pleasing people. Only God can fill him with love and make him whole. And in God's hands, that little disheveled shepherd boy from Bethlehem becomes the greatest king of Israel and the ancestor of Jesus, the Savior and King of the world.

When Jesus rides into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday the crowd cries out, "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matthew 21:9) "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" (Mark 11:10) They assume Jesus will be a king like David. He will wage war,

conquer lands, kill their foes and purge evil. And they are right – Jesus does come to rule and reign as our King. They are right when they shout, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” They are right when they cry Hosanna because Hosanna means “save us.” But they are also wrong and so are we.

They are wrong about the location of the battlefield. It’s not on the outside but on the inside. The fight is not in the valleys around Jerusalem but in the valley of the shadow of death that lies inside my soul. The war is not against legions of soldiers but against the dark forces whose name is Legion. The enemy is not those other people over there, but the sin in here. And the evil can never be purged from our land until Someone comes and purges it from our hearts. That’s why David prays “Create in me a pure heart, O God.” David knows where the real war is won or lost – in the hollows of my heart.

That’s what Jesus, our King, comes to do. Hosanna: He comes to save us...from us. The battle is fought on a dark hill called Golgotha and in every human heart. It does not matter what you look like, where you’ve been, or what you’ve done. Jesus looks into your heart. He longs to clean out whatever sin is buried there and fill you with a love that never lets go.

The only question that stands before you is: who is your King? Will you follow the kingdom of outward appearances? Will you follow the kingdom of shallow fads and temporary trends? Will you follow the kingdom of ego and pride? Will you follow the kingdom of desire and excess? Will you follow the kingdom of envy and greed? Will you follow the kingdom of injustice, racism and prejudice?

Or will you surrender and follow King Jesus?

Will you place your heart in His hands?