1 Samuel 16:1-13 *A Decision of the Heart* 7/31/16

One of the things Marcia and I have learned about being transitional pastors, (pastors who intentionally go into a church after a pastor has left to help prepare the congregation for their next pastor), is that no matter what the reasons that led to the pastor’s leaving, whether the pastor was asked to leave much like King Saul was told he would no longer be King, or if the pastor retired after a successful ministry, the congregation goes through a time of mourning. They grieve what was or what could have been, and are unsure what the future now holds.

One of our jobs is to assure the congregation that God is still in the house (so to speak). God has not left. It may have been time for the pastor to move on for whatever reason, but God is still here. And some congregations more than others take convincing that God is still here guiding and leading.

In our own lives we will go through many transitions: people we love leaving or dying, or jobs we thought would always be there coming to an end, the nest egg we put away being eaten away, and the health of our youth slowly diminishing into the body of our old age. We have and will continue to go through lots of change in our life, but God is always there for us. We may feel God’s presence some times more than others, but God is always helping us move to our next steps.

That is what Samuel is finding out in today’s scripture text. He is mourning the loss of Saul as King when God comes to Samuel and tells him the time of mourning is now ended. It is time to move on; it is time to anoint the next King.

God sends Samuel to the house of Jesse for he has told him that one of his sons will be the next king. Samuel arrives under the pretext of coming to lead a worship service and asks Jesse to meet his sons. Jesse introduces him to his first born son, the first of his brood of boys and Samuel takes one look at Eliab, how big and strong he is, and thinks this must be the one, when God said, “not so fast. It is not Eliab.” So, Jesse introduces Samuel to his second son, Abinadab, but God said, “nope, not him.” And this happens with the third son, and then the fourth son, and then the fifth son, and then the sixth son.

Can you imagine what Samuel was feeling? Each time he thought, this must be the one and each time God said, “nope, not that one!” If you can, then you can begin to feel what the search committee has been going through.

One of the other jobs Marcia and I have has Transitional Pastors is to get a feel for when a congregation is ready to begin to move beyond the grieving process and onto its next steps. We take the time to acknowledge all the past pastor has done, whether it is good or bad, have grieved the fact that they are no longer here BUT God is still here and ready to move us forward.

When the congregation begins to realize God is still here and life will go on even without the pastor, it is time for the congregation to put the search committee together. The search committee you chose was Kathy Purington and Lisa Heffner as Co-chairs, Charles Washington, Dustin Flay, Bob Walk, Pat Smith, Rita Paez, and Kyle Smith.

You remember over a year ago they did a number of surveys with you to understand who Frist Baptist Church is now and what kind of pastor First Baptist is looking for in this next phase of its long life. Based on your answers they compiled all of the information, put together a church profile giving the history and snapshot and dreams of First Baptist and they compiled the profile of what you are looking for in your next pastor.

And so the process began. First they read all the profiles of pastors who looked at First Baptist’s profile and decided this was a church they wanted to explore. Then the excitement began to build as the committee read the profiles and thought this might be the perfect person for First Baptist based on the profile, but you notice what God said to Samuel who only looked at the outside of the sons of Jesse to determine if they would fit the criteria of being the next king.

God rebuked Samuel and told him, “You are only looking at the outside of the person. You need to look at their heart.” It is then your prayer support was absolutely necessary as the committee began the first round of interviews which they did over skype so all would be on the same playing field as they interviewed them to find out who they were, where *their* heart was.

After the first round of interviews, then the neutral pulpits took place to experience how the person led worship and the various preaching styles that are out there and you know just having experienced Marcia and me that there are many different types of preaching styles.

Then it came down to the finalists and the decision to have the second interviews and listening for the heart of the candidate and was the candidate feeling called to be the next pastor of First Baptist church. And the committee’s seeking God in prayer as to whether or not they felt this person was being called by God to be the next pastor at First Baptist Church.

The committee when it first was formed agreed that they would call the next pastor of First Baptist only if it was by a consensus vote of the entire committee. Here to report out to you today are your two Co-Chairs, Kathy and Lisa. (**Search Committee Shares its Report**). Let’s give them and God a round of applause.

Now the responsibility shifts to you as you prepare to meet your candidate. Next Sunday Marcia and I will both be away and Rev. Judy Miller and Marcia will be back on 8/14 to guide you in your preparation. But for now, let us enjoy the moment and give thanks to God as we bring to God in prayer all of our joys and concerns. AMEN!