

**1 Samuel 16**  
**A Time to Grow: Lent 4**  
**March 10, 2024**  
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The drama in 1 Samuel 16 is a much-loved story. Jesse brought each of his first seven sons before Samuel to see which son would be anointed as king. When the eldest son Eliab, who was tall and fair, passed before Samuel, the prophet thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." God's response has echoed down through the ages: "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see: they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (v. 7). Jesse then paraded all his sons in front of Samuel, but each time God said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." There was one more son, but he was the youngest and of such little account that Jesse had left him out in the field tending the sheep. In the ancient Near East, the shepherd was a symbol of the king. Ancient audiences would have been touched by the irony that the one who was thought too insignificant to be considered for the role of king was actually already fulfilling his future vocation: shepherding the flock

At the start of 1 Samuel 16, God says to Samuel: "I have provided for myself a king among [Jesse's] sons." The Hebrew word that is translated here as "provided" literally means "to see". And it looks like what God is looking for in the next King is hidden inside. At the request of Samuel, the youngest finally comes. Naturally, he has small stature, as he is still a "boy," a term repeated by Goliath in the following chapter. But despite the small stature, Samuel realizes that the youngest son, David, is the one anointed by God. Samuel ceremoniously anoints David in front of some surely perplexed brothers. "And the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward" (13).

This week, in our A Time to Grow sermon series we are talking about light. Light, as we know, is essential to most life as we know it. With the exception of fungi and cave dwelling organism, we all need light to survive. Light is necessary in the life of the garden, and the amount of sunlight a plant receives matters significantly. Various levels of light are needed to make different plants happy. This could be said of humans too. Every year my sister asks me when I will be moving to Ohio so she can be closer to the girls, and every year I ask her – is there still winter in Ohio? The kind of winter where there isn't any sunshine?! You see I need more light, to be happy, and the light in an Ohio winter just isn't going to cut it.

While this text is more concerned with seeing, it strikes me that to see we need light. Even more so, it strikes me that in the story of David's anointing the light of God helps Samuel, and others, to see in the darkness. Moreover, what God is looking for is found inside each of us. What we will become, who we will be, what we will contribute comes from inside of us and into the light of day when we shine in the world. This text reminds us that the Holy is looking into the heart of each of us. God wants to know if people know, how to weep and hold space with others. God wants to know if people

have a passion for justice and a heart for the lost. But what if, God is looking into our communal heart, as well. What does the heart of DCC say about who we are, or what our character is like?

Seeing ourselves is a weird thing right? I hate looking in the mirror. I avoid it whenever I can. But what is more is, I don't do a lot of heart work either. I don't do a lot of internal looking. I try to do right by people. I try to forgive and communicate and not to do harm. I try to honor and hold space. I try to be funny when it allows to alleviate the tension. But even in all that work I can't really see myself clearly. And so, I am always amazed when people know my heart. When people see me in a way I hadn't, or appreciate something about me I wasn't even aware was there. Even if we know ourselves well, we can't know how we are experienced by others or the impact we are making on others. We can't know how our kind word helped on a hard day, we can't know how the sharing of our story offered space for others, we can't know how our vulnerability showed others the way forward, we can't know how our humor was a light in a dark spot for others. Even if we look and look and look, we won't ever see our whole selves the way others are able to. We won't ever be able to know the impact that just showing up and being ourselves has on those around us. And I think most the time that is really a shame. Because I think we have more impact on others that we realize. I think if we could see ourselves the way others, who love us do, we might really like what we see.

What is more, I think the same could be said of our community as well. I've been here three years now friends, and yet, recently I have been reminded of who we are. Again, I think it is easy to go along doing the thing and be so immersed in the work of welcoming, growing, and serving, that we forget that the way we do things in this space, while second nature to most of us at this point, is still very unlike other faith communities and is certainly unlike the world.

So, this week as I prepared I started wondering if my job as the preacher isn't so much to talk about light, as it is to shine a light on the things I see God doing in our midst. Or even maybe the ways I see us answering the call of God. The ways in which I see us living into our call to welcome, grow, and serve. Maybe my job as the preacher is to tell the stories of the ways our light is shining in the darkness. To remind you why our work is important, and to remind you that what you are doing changes lives - much in the same way sunlight keeps plants alive. So, let's get started...

This first one is going to need some back story - I might have shared this story before but I am going to share it again. My senior year of church camp I made an unexpected friend. In my small group was a kid named Jennifer. Well, that wasn't her name at the time, but her name now, is Jennifer. And Jennifer was a shy kid. A little bit emo, they had green hair, and they were quiet, and they hung back always taking it all in. That year what I remember was that getting them to smile was almost impossible. And as you can imagine I made it my mission to make them my friend. You know, open them up a bit, help them like camp, and help them feel included. As you can imagine I was the Elmyra of church camp. We remember Elmyra right? Elmyra was a cartoon character from the 90's cartoon Tiny Toons Adventures. She was obsessed with animals and cute things and had a real knack for over enthusiastic affection. So

overenthusiastically I worked and worked that week to get Jennifer to like me. I was pretty sure I failed. Until one day on the swings they asked me if I had ever considered what it would be like to end my life. I hadn't, but I knew whatever I said next would be important. I remember praying that I would have the right words. I don't really remember what I said, but, that moment began a lifelong friendship and has always been a formative moment in my own call story.

Fast forward to a few weeks ago at Connections. In the aftermath of Nex Benedict's death Allie and the youth talked about what it looks like to use their voice to create change. How to write letters to government officials, how to pay attention to laws that affect them, how to be changemakers. I know it was a hard night for them. Because they, like Nex, are middle and highschoolers who are bravely living into who they are. As I looked around at all of our really fabulous and super cool kids, I wondered what it would have looked like for Jennifer if such a place had existed for her. You see three years ago, Jennifer began living authentically as Jennifer. I couldn't be prouder of her, and yet, I wonder what it would have looked like for her if she had been part of a community that supported who she was, welcomed her just as she was, wrestled with her about what it all meant, offered bathrooms with inclusive language, taught her how to use her voice, taught her that who she was inside and out was loved and valued and important. If she had had that, would she of felt safe enough and brave enough to be who she was in high school instead of when she was in her thirties? So, let's shine the light there. On the work that Allie is doing with connections – but not just Allie. Because Kris is there week in and week out too, playing sardines and dealing with unruly teenagers and being a reliable adult in their lives. But not just Kris and Allie, because all of you have supplied snacks and your offering money makes programing happen and keeps the building in working order so they have a place to gather. There is a place in Northeast Oklahoma that exists for kids to be valued and loved however they walk through our doors and for that I am incredibly proud of us. This work dear ones, is shining a light in the darkness..

While we are on that topic, I was part of another conversation recently, with a visitor who told me about some very deep and still very present church trauma in their life. They showed up to connections to see what it was all about, but she wanted to know more about what DCC was about, too. She and her family had been invited multiple times by members of our community. And then she had found us at our booth at PRIDE this year. She knew her kid needed community so she braved the trauma to check out connections. At the end of the conversation, she confessed that she hadn't set foot in a church building in a very long time. And then she said this – “even the building has a different feel than any other churches I have been in.” And that struck me so deeply. Because you know what? You don't change the way a building feels – you don't change the air – without living authentically. You don't make a building FEEL welcoming without embodying Welcome. And that's who we are. After one worship experience with us she said, “I can tell that y'all are who you say you are. You aren't just talking about love and inclusivity; you are walking the walk too I felt safe leaving my kid in worship when I stepped out.” Seems little right? Heck I leave my kids under all of your alls watchful eye every Sunday and just assume someone will correct them

if they act a fool, and someone will get them a cookie, and someone will find me if it is important. Free range kids here at church. But that isn't second nature to everyone. The work we are doing – they way we embody who we are, made a way for a family who had given up on the idea that church could be a safe space, to return to the table and to tentatively pull up a seat. This work dear ones, is shining light in the darkness..

This week we hosted candlelight yoga. We had 25 people present. Some of the faces were familiar, but most were not. For an hour we stretched in this space in candlelight and with Ben's musical stylings in the background. Our bodies were relaxed and rejuvenated. While it wasn't overtly religious, I found that time to be sacred and set apart. An experience to connect with oneself. At the end Tari Carbaugh reminded us that namaste, is a Sanskrit word meaning, "the light in me honors the light in you". It is meant to remind us of our interconnectedness. This work dear ones, of offering alternative ways of gathering, of inviting folks into our building, of providing space, candlelight, yoga, and music, this work is shining light in the darkness..

And then Friday night the Garden committee hosted a fundraising Bingo event. I heard so many good things about how fun it was. But more than fun, they did the community organizing work to gather donations and auction items from local business and individuals, they hosted over 80 for Bingo and raised \$2300 in an effort to build a community garden. They worked so that soon, we may be able to offer food to the community outside these walls. Soon we might be able to build new avenues to community through working alongside one another in the garden. All so that we might expand our food ministry in an effort to close the gap on food insecurity. This work dear ones, is shining a light in the darkness...

These are only the stories of the last few days. I could tell you the ways in which our love offering to Kendall and Saul shone a light in their world. I could tell you about the ways the prayer cards from our prayer group have made an impact. I could share with you all the times I hear DCC mentioned in the community. I could tell you about all the times I know each of you have invited or shared your lived stories of light in the darkness because this place exists. I could stand here for hours telling you the stories that we don't always see or hear about, about a church on Douglas Lane that is shining light into the darkness – with their money, with their presence, with their thoughtfulness of how to offer extravagant welcome, and with the work they put in to build the kingdom of God here in this place and in this time.

You see, today I could of talked about light. But, sometimes we need to see the light for ourselves. Like I said earlier, sometimes it's easy to forget just how much what we do and say matters. And that's true in communities too. I think we forget because it's just who are. It's just what we do. We are so inundated into the culture we have created that to us it is old news. But ya know what? There are so many people for whom the way in which we operate, the way in which we work to Welcome, Grow, and Serve is THE news. There are so many people for whom DCC is light in darkness. And so I want to remind you today of that light that each of you are. Because even if we have grown accustomed to it, I don't want us for a minute to forget how important the work we are doing is for so many. I don't want us to forget how rare of a community

we are. And I don't want us to forget because growth and life happen as a result of shining light into the darkness. In the plant world photosynthesis doesn't happen without the light, and in ours change doesn't happen without the light.

It reminds me of the Crowded Table song Tim and Maria sang last week. I think we tend to think about the table metaphor in that song more than the garden one, but it's just as important. The lyrics say –

If we want a garden, we're gonna have to sow the seed  
Plant a little happiness, let the roots run deep  
If it's love that we give then it's love that we reap  
If we want a garden, we're gonna have to sow the seed

The seeds have been planted. The soil has been laid. The water has been poured and now we must shine light so that the garden can grow. So that we can reap the love that's been planted. So that we can share that love again and again and again and for generations to come. May the garden that grows in this place, be big and beautiful and wild and free and colorful and full of hope and love. We must continue the work friends of carrying and sharing, and tending to the light. For the very thing we are growing into is the very thing the world needs.

Amen.