

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who creates in us clean hearts, Jesus Christ our Savior and our Lord, amen.

It's official. Our intelligence agencies don't know what they're doing... I've felt that way for many years. Many in America feel that way right now, after the botched withdraw from Afghanistan doing what I never thought I would have seen in my lifetime, leaving Americans and American allies behind... Don't you get frustrated when leaders don't seem to know what they're doing? Many in our country feel that way about our government officials today. They figure if the government knew what they were doing, our response to the pandemic and our country's economic recovery would be in much better shape. It shouldn't surprise us when government officials don't know what they're doing; they're only human. It's quite a different issue when people begin to feel that God doesn't know what he's doing – especially in regard to the people he chooses to lead both in government and in the Church. Our text today puts those thoughts to rest. God knows what he's doing when he chooses leaders. That's because God detects, and he directs hearts. Let's find out what that means.

Ever since the terrorist attempt to blow up an airliner with explosives packed into his underwear and shoes, you we have to take off our shoes and step through a full body scanner before boarding any flight at an airport. As one radio commentator quipped, "Be sure you're wearing clean underwear!" One thing that

scanner won't be able to see, however, is what's in your heart and mind. The scanner operator won't know if you're annoyed at the increased security or if you don't mind it because you're just so happy to be flying somewhere warm for vacation when we've all been restricted for so long. God can see these and every other thought. God detects what's in our hearts.

God made that clear to the prophet Samuel in our text. The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel?" (1 Samuel 16:2) Samuel was bummed because King Saul had turned out to be such a disappointment. He had started out as a humble leader but along the way thought he could do better on his own and so Saul ignored God's Word. This weighed heavily on Samuel, and God knew Samuel's grief over Saul's destiny. Even this morning God knows what's weighing on your heart even if no one else does. So why hold on to those cares? Hand them over to your Lord. Let God carry your burden for you since he already knows what they are anyway. If we refuse to hand over our worries, we only have ourselves to blame when those concerns weigh us down to the point immobility. Maybe you've already handed your cares over to the Lord, but you're still having a hard time getting out of bed to face the day. If so, talk to your doctor. There should be no stigma in seeking help for depression or mental illness just as there is no stigma for seeking help if you get Covid. There's my shameless plug for Mental Health Awareness Month.

God not only knows what's bothering us, he knows what makes us tick.

When God sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint the next king from one of Jesse's eight sons, he was conducting a different kind of examination of the candidates than Samuel was. When Samuel saw Jesse's eldest son, Eliab, he was certain God wanted this man as king. But God said: "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him." The LORD does not look at the things we look at. We judge by a person's looks and their outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. God knew the hearts of all eight of Jesse's sons and he rejected them all except for the youngest, David.

What was it that God saw in David that others didn't? It must have been the child-like faith David demonstrated later when going up against the giant Goliath. While seasoned soldiers, including David's own brothers, cowered, David strode up to the giant, confident God would not let this oversized bully get away with cursing his people. And so, it didn't matter to David that he was outmatched. David knew the battle was the Lord's, not his. Getting back to today's story, David's father and brothers must have wondered at God's choice. Did God know what he was doing? David was a snot-nosed kid whose only known talent was to follow sheep around. We too may feel that way about God's choice of leaders in our midst. Can we really trust a 64-year old former military officer to lead our congregation? Can God be calling me to teach Sunday School? How can I really

handle those Sunday School kids? Does God have any idea what it takes to keep a Church Building and the property in serviceable condition? When we say things like that we're forgetting something: formally or informally, God himself has called these individuals to fill those positions of leadership. We may not think they're up to the task, but God obviously does.

Does this mean we should never criticize our leaders? No, God did that with King Saul. But he criticized Saul because he abandoned the Lord and did things his own way. As we prepare for our Annual Congregational Meeting in just a couple of weeks now is the time to ensure the leaders we pick for our own Church Council are the people God would choose. Leaders who are faithful in developing and using their talents. People of God who are diligently using God's Word and their gifts to the best of their abilities. The leaders we have already chosen should be encouraged and affirmed in their calling from God. After all they are God's choice and God knows what he's doing.

Yes, our leaders need your encouragement. Why? Because when I hear how God detects hearts it makes me shudder. I'm the first one to say "How could God have chosen me to be a pastor. I'm short tempered and short sighted. I'm stubborn and I like to get my own way..." There are many other qualities I could mention, but I'm sure you all know me by now... Evidently, God did not choose me because he knows I'm such a swell guy. It makes me tremble to hear that God

detects hearts, for it means that God knows every single reason why I'm not cut out to be your shepherd, just as God knew that David would one day commit adultery and engineer a man's death to cover up his sin. So, why did God choose David to be king? Why did he choose a sinner like me to be your pastor? The same reason he chose you (and me) to be his children: grace. Grace is "God's Riches At Christ's Expense." God chooses the weak, the vulnerable. God picks the one's who have nothing of apparent value to elevate so that all people will know when great things happen it was God who was truly responsible. God works miracles in ordinary people to shine forth His Glory!

Thank God he not only detects hearts but also directs them. When Samuel anointed David we're told that the Holy Spirit came upon him in power (1 Samuel 16:13). At your anointing in baptism the Holy Spirit also came upon you with that same power. He created or strengthened faith in your heart so that the forgiveness Jesus won for everyone in the world is now a benefit to you. I speak for myself here, but I know I need a daily reminder that it's God himself who directs my heart because when I hear how God expects his pastors to shepherd his people by binding up the brokenhearted, teaching and equipping the saints for ministry, it's easy to wonder: "Who is equal to the task?" On my own I'm certainly not.

Thanks be to God, I'm not on my own. Neither are any of you! God directs your hearts by giving you the gifts to do the job to which he has called you. Trust him

and you'll find courage in him. God was with David when he faced lions and bears. God was with David when he went face to face against the giant, Goliath. God was even with David when David was in despair over the guilt of his sin with Bathsheba. I'm certain David would never have chosen any of those life altering events in his life if he had not trusted God for his daily bread. God has promised to be with David and He has promised to be with you when you face your monsters, giants, and even your sin and guilt.

I don't envy security personal whose job it is to keep terrorists off airplanes. Their job would be so much easier if they could detect what's in the minds and hearts of travelers like God can. Yes, God can see through you. He knows when a smile is hiding a judgmental heart. He's aware when we inwardly seethe even as we offer words of forgiveness. Tremble at this knowledge. God does not take this kind of hypocrisy lightly, just ask King Saul. That's why there is no room for boasting about our positions of leadership. God called me to be your pastor in spite of what he saw in my heart. Thank goodness God doesn't just detect hearts, but directs them as well. So, we pray the words King David wrote so long ago, "Create in me a clean heart, O God and put a new and right spirit within me!" Let's never forget -- God knows what he's doing! May continue to be blessed by God's anointed leaders. Amen.