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By Wayne J. Schneider

## **What You See Is Not Always Reality.**

1 Samuel 15:34–16:13

In a small country village in Sicily, there were two brothers, Luigi and Guiseppe, renowned members of the local Mafia. They were mean, bad, and rich. No one had a good word to say about them. Indeed, everyone seemed to have a story about how they had either been cheated or maligned by the brothers.

One day, one of the brothers, Guiseppe, died. The surviving brother, Luigi, with a rare touch of conscience, felt that something nice should be said about his brother at the funeral. So he went to the local priest and said: *“I know that people in the village hate us, and they don’t know half of what we have been up to. However, I want you to say something nice about Guiseppe at his funeral. I want you to say that Guiseppe was a saint when you preach. If you will agree to do that, I’ll show my gratitude by giving one hundred thousand Euros towards the repair of the church.”*

And with that, Luigi held out a check for that amount. *“If you don’t,”* Luigi continued *“you’ll be in big trouble with me and you know what that means.”* The priest thought about it for a minute, agreed, and took Luigi’s check.

A week later, the whole village turned out for the funeral, curious to hear what the priest would say. After the opening hymns had been sung and the readings had been read, the priest climbed up into the pulpit and delivered his sermon. Eyeing the brother, sitting in the front row, the priest said how evil the pair of them had been.

He went on to say how Guiseppe had cheated, not only in business but on his wife, how he had lied, and how he had had no concern for anyone but himself. In fact, he went on to say what a downright scoundrel Guiseppe had been.

After ten minutes of preaching in this way, the priest, being a man of integrity, ended his sermon by simply saying "*But, compared to his brother, Luigi - Guiseppe was a saint.*"

Sometimes, we make personal decisions based on our senses. When we do this, when we make choices regarding other people on how they speak or what they look like or how valuable they are; then these conclusions often have little to do with reality. This creates fertile ground for false assumptions, because our views become clouded by non-essential things such as age, gender, race, education and so on.

This is why I relate so well to the prophet Samuel, as he is directed by God to anoint a new King. The prophet arrives in Bethlehem and goes to the home of Jesse. There, the selection of a new king begins. The prophet's enigma evolves into a kind of pre-Shakespearian comedy. Jesse's sons, one-by-one, parade before Samuel.

Can you picture the scene? Each son, beginning with the eldest, smartest, tallest, most handsome son, strut by the prophet; and as each goes by, Samuel says to himself, "Sure, this is the one . . . no, this is the one . . . OK, this is the one . . . But God rejects each candidate , , , until the seventh son.

The prophet is looking through his senses but they are faulty. His vision is cloudy. Like you and I, he is concentrating on the wrong thing: physical characteristics. He is caught up in tradition: honoring the first born. Yet, as is often the case, God's ways are different than our ways. "*The LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.*" God is looking for a king of integrity and faithfulness, a leader who will both obey and live by God's will.

The beauty of God's grace is that it preforms astounding operations in a heart that is willing.

No one could have predicted that a young African American preacher in Atlanta, would present such a prophetic and revolutionary word. Who knew that Martin Luther King, Jr. would become the voice of our civil rights movement; or

that his life and death would hasten the beginning of equality for all people. His life continues to inspire us today.

People like Jimmy Carter and Clarence Jordan: one an American president with a Nobel Peace Prize, and the other with a PhD. in Greek, who was the founder of Koinonia Farms, an intentional, interracial farming community in Americus, Georgia. His goal was to help people discover a new vision of what the kingdom of God might look like here on Earth; and who authored "*The Cotton Patch Bible*."

These leaders, and countless other women and men like them, remind us that God seeks character and possibilities, not how we look or where we live. It is so easy for us to see others and then dismiss them because we, like Samuel, have vision problems. We work from a preconceived prejudice of how people should be or act.

We reject people who may be the very people we are looking for, because they don't 'fit' our 'mold.' God must tell the prophet six times to keep looking, and challenge him to keep his mind and eyes open. Then, as usual, God chooses the least likely candidate!

David does not meet any of Samuel's wrongfully imagined qualifications. Do we begin to understand how often we also do this? God has to open Samuel's heart and eyes to see the possibilities God sees in David. Is this not a test for the church as well? Is God asking us to look around and discover the opportunities and possibilities that God sees today? Are we willing to look at ourselves, and our world, differently than ever before? Could a new day be dawning for us and for the church universal? I pray that it be so. Alleluia. Amen.