

## HUMILITY AND VISIBILITY

1 Samuel 18:1-16  
Romans 6:3-11

I wonder if you have ever had a day that, unexpectedly, changed your life? There are some life-changes that we know are coming - our wedding day, or the births of our children, or our retirement. But there are other days which we look back on knowing that on that day everything changed, but when we got out of bed in the morning we had no idea that they were going to. It could be the day you suddenly saw your job advertised, even though perhaps you weren't looking for a move. It could be the day that some member of your family dies, unexpectedly, with no time for preparation. It could be the day you crash the car. A year and a half ago it was the day that a baggage handler went to work at Glasgow airport, went out for a cigarette break, got caught up in the terrorist attack there and John Smeaton emerged as a national hero.

For David the affair of Goliath was a bit like that. He went to take some cheese to his brothers and their commander, got caught up in the stand-off, found himself taking on the warrior with his sling, and by the end of the day the King was refusing to let him go home again, the crown prince had become his best friend, and the army hailed him as a national hero. From that day on there was to be no more of sheep for the shepherd boy. Everything changed. He was a part of the royal household now.

Not that this meant an immediate return to peace-time. Saul and his army didn't go home right away. The hero, Goliath was dead and the Philistine army demoralised, but they still had to be driven out of the country. Saul assumes that David will be good at this - you might wonder why he should think this, since David has so little military experience. But his reputation as the giant-slayer would have been an inspiration to his own side and become a legend of terror to the enemy. And, as they had seen, God was with him. And so, one way or another - and we are not given the military details, David is successful in helping Saul finally deal with the Philistine army. So the next lesson of leadership that David learns is the lesson of visibility. He has to be seen. If he is to lead the people, if he is to be King, he won't be able to be invisible.

Some of us love visibility. We are born show-offs who can't get enough of the limelight. Last week I found one of these celebrity gossip magazines abandoned on a train. Glancing through its revelations about the lives of people whom I'd never heard of, I wondered again, as I have before, how people can live with the press pack always pursuing them. But some people pursue celebrity.

Others of us hate the idea of people seeing us, watching us, with a passion. In the most extreme cases such people become recluses, seeing almost no one and telling no one any of their affairs.

Most of us are somewhere in the middle. We don't know where David was in all this, on a sliding scale of introvert to extrovert. Some of his psalms would suggest that there was certainly an introverted side to him - that he could enjoy time alone, spent with God and resulting in very personal songs. But now he learns the lesson of visibility. God's leaders can't be totally invisible!

He also gets popular acclaim, and by the time that the army returns home and David accompanies Saul to his court, his exploits have won him renown, so that the women come out to fete him in song and Saul realises that while David is very useful to him, he could also be a threat to his power. And remember, at this time Saul doesn't know that Samuel has anointed David.

Now Saul turns on David, and so, lest all this visibility and praise should go to his head, David also learns humility. Saul has tried to kill him, but still he must obey him as his sovereign lord. Saul is at times a monster in private, but David must still honour him and work to do his bidding. And so Saul makes use of David to strengthen his own power, and God gives David success. And in his humility God blesses him. In his visibility the people see what he is really like. David marches out and comes in leading them: they see him all the time, and so they know what he is like. He has to be open before them.

When God calls leaders, for his church or to take his gospel to the world (and that latter is the task, one way or another, for everyone in the church) one of the lessons they have to learn is to live openly and humbly before others. People can smell a fraud, and when they sense inconsistency in us, they call us hypocrites. By this stage in his story, Saul has become a hypocrite. He is a Jekyll and Hyde sort of character. He is one thing in private -moody and vicious - and another thing in public, and even if they don't know this, the people sense it; but David is the same all the time. All the time he knows that he depends on God, he says that he depends on God, and so God is with him, and the people love him.

Jesus too was called to live before the world with visibility and humility. His life in public began at his baptism, when he humbly identified himself with sinful humanity, even though he himself was without sin. His life in public ended on the cross. That too was a most visible and humbling thing - to hang naked in agony before the people. His baptism foreshadowed his death in its humility and public statement. These two events come at either end of his ministry and tell us what he was and is about. He is about living God's kingdom life openly before the world, no matter what.

When we are baptised, Paul reminds us, we are baptised into Christ's death. We are baptised into the saving power of Christ's death, and our old self dies with him. For us baptism is a sign, among other things, of our new birth in Christ, and we do well to remember that when we are united with Christ in baptism, it means that we are called to join him in living an open, visible life. People will be watching. We don't need to go out of our way to attract their attention, if we don't want to, but they will be watching, they are watching and they notice. They don't always notice what we want them to see, either!

I learned that lesson very young. I was only in my second year at high school, when one day one of my friends swore in the course of saying something. There was nothing unusual in that, it happened all the time, and I had never dared to object to it - I don't think it had occurred to me that I might! But this time, as soon as the oath had left her lips, she turned to me and apologised. "Sorry, Catherine, I know you don't swear, do you." I may say, I was gob-smacked. It had never occurred to me that people were taking note of what I did or didn't do. But this one was.

If you are known to be a Christian, or known to be a church-goer, people are watching you and while you may not get any credit when you do the right thing, you will soon be discredited if you do the wrong thing, or pretend to be something you are not. We are baptised into Christ's humility and his visibility.

The lesson of humility and visibility is not one that we can learn once and then we know it. It's not like learning your two times table or how to spell "elephant" ("EL - el E -e PHANT - phant elephant!"). Instead it is something which we are called on to remember and work on every day of our lives. People will be watching - and, of course, God is watching, with love and understanding. Faith in Christ cannot

be hidden, and it is only as people see the everyday details of our lives that they will realise that we are serious about putting that faith into practice. And it is as we put that faith into practice in the everyday matters, that we are prepared, as David was, to use our faith in the times when we are faced with sudden, big happenings or decisions. David would never have had the confidence to face Goliath in the first place if he hadn't had a habitual faith in God informing his actions and his reactions in life.

We have been united with Christ in his death, and so the life we live now is his risen life, alive to God and looking always towards him. As Christians we say that we live all our lives only by faith in Christ: what this means is that we are called to live lives of humility and visibility in witness to the love of the one who died for us.