

**God-Smacked**  
**1 Samuel 16:1-13**  
**Sermon by Dan Schrock**  
**March 30, 2014**  
**Lent 4**

*The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons."<sup>2</sup>Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.'<sup>3</sup>Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you."<sup>4</sup>Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?"<sup>5</sup>He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.*

*<sup>6</sup>When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord."<sup>7</sup>But the Lord said to Samuel, "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."<sup>8</sup>Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one."<sup>9</sup>Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one."<sup>10</sup>Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these."<sup>11</sup>Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here."<sup>12</sup>He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one."<sup>13</sup>Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah. (NRSV)*

**D**uring my first year at Chicago Theological Seminary, I lived in one of the seminary's dormitories. One afternoon at 5:00 I left my dorm room and walked down to the dormitory kitchen, located in the basement. This kitchen served all the students who lived in that dorm. We each had our own cupboard and cooked our own food. That evening I went downstairs to cook myself a quick supper.

When I walked into the kitchen, I noticed a middle-aged African-American man cooking pigs' feet at the stove. His presence surprised me because I didn't recognize him. Chicago Theological was a diverse mix of students, about one-third African American and two-thirds white, about half women and half men, some gay or lesbian and some straight, from lots of different denominations: National Baptist, Missionary Baptist, UCC, Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal, and others,

including one Mennonite, which was me. The seminary was small, however, and by this time in the academic year, I thought I knew every student. Yet I had never seen this man before.

He and I were the only people in the kitchen. When I entered, he turned around from his work at the stove, glanced at me, then abruptly said: “You have it in you. I can tell.” Then he whirled back to stir his pot of boiling pigs’ feet.

He offered me no greeting. He didn’t tell me his name and didn’t ask for my name. He engaged in no social chit-chat. He only said two sentences: “You have it in you. I can tell.”

I did not know what to say in response. I was only 25 years old and was a shy, quiet introvert. I did not think well on my feet. I was secretly glad that after uttering his pronouncement, he ignored me.

However, I sensed something holy and numinous in this encounter. It felt like God, in the guise of this man, had just smacked me. I struggled to understand the enigmatic nature of this encounter. What did the man’s words mean? What, exactly, was “it” that I supposedly had in me? And how could this man tell? What did he possibly know of me, since I had never seen him before; and in fact, never saw him again after that day? Since all of us students knew each other, and since the seminary buildings were only accessible by keycard, where did this man come from? Who was he? Could he be a psychic? A prophet? Some kind of messenger? Was it possible God sent him? I had no idea what to make of him or his message. And yet for all the mystery surrounding this encounter, I felt God had just communicated something terribly important to me, something significant and consequential.

**W**hen has God brought you up short, grabbed your attention, and left you a bit confused about what just happened? What encounters with God have you had?

**I**n 1 Samuel 16, David had an encounter with God that surely left his mind spinning. The story doesn't tell us how old David was, but we can guess he was quite young—maybe between 8 and 14 years old.

Let's think about this story from David's perspective. David, a boy of perhaps 8 to 14, works every day tending his family's sheep on the hillsides outside Bethlehem. The days are long: from early morning until early evening, sheep are his constant companions and the focus of his energies. He rests only at night when he calls the sheep into the sheepfold; but even then, someone has to stay with the sheep to protect them from predators and thieves, and that someone is David. Sheep-watching is a grunt job for boys who don't have anything more important to do.

David, you see, is the youngest of the family, sometimes ridiculed, sometimes harassed, sometimes taken advantage of by his 7 older brothers. Those older brothers think they're more important than he is. After all, they do "valuable" things like fight in the king's army. But not David. His life is circumscribed by lowly sheep which were neither intelligent nor interesting. David may have an inferiority complex.

Being the youngest in the family also meant that David had poor economic prospects. The ancient practice of primogeniture dictated that Eliab, his oldest brother, would inherit most or all of the family's wealth. Consequently he, youngest brother, would receive very little inherited wealth from their father. Whatever economic resources David achieved in life would have to come by the sweat of his own body.

In sum, David may have been healthy, vigorous, and handsome, but his future was not very rosy. If he were alive today and needed to come up with a résumé, he'd have to say the following:

Objective:	Entry level position in farming.
Education:	None.
Experience:	Taking care of sheep and fighting off wild animals.
Achievements:	Successfully preserved my father's sheep from all harm.
References:	My father, Jesse; and my three oldest brothers, Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah.

On the day of our story, David is out on the hills surrounded by sheep. For him this day is like any other day. Then at some point—let us say in late afternoon—a surprising event takes place. Around 4 PM or so, David sees one of his sisters running toward him from the village. When she arrives she breathlessly bursts out that he should go back to the house immediately. The great prophet Samuel arrived in the village very morning, pulling a heifer behind him which he claims he's going to sacrifice to God in the presence of their family. His sister also describes a strange ritual: their father is making each son, from oldest to youngest, walk silently in front of Samuel. "Dad wants you to come right way," she says. "We don't know what's going on. Why is Samuel really here? And why does he want to see all you brothers? What does he care about the likes of us?"

Minutes later, young David stands in front of Samuel. Scattered around the room are his other brothers, his parents, and the elders of the village. The room feels tense, apprehensive, anxious. All eyes are on him, David. Most troubling of all are the eyes of Samuel, who gazes at him keenly. Without warning or words, Samuel suddenly stands up, strides to David, reaches inside his robe, pulls out a

ram's horn, unstops the end, locks eyes with David, and silently pours the entire horn of olive oil on David's head.

The story doesn't say what thoughts and emotions David had in that moment. One emotion was surely astonishment, because even though Samuel said nothing when he poured the oil on David's head, everyone in the room knew what this action meant: it meant that David, young shepherd who most people dismissed and even disrespected as unimportant, was now the anointed one of Israel, God's own choice to be the next king.

While the meaning of Samuel's action was clear enough, the details of how this would come about were maddeningly obscure. Think about it. King Saul still ruled Israel and was not likely to die anytime soon, so how was David supposed to become king? What about Saul's many sons, the princes of Israel, all of whom were in genetic line for the throne? David and his family were surely confused by the implications of this anointing.

**W**hat encounters with God have you had? When has God brought you up short, grabbed your attention, and left you a bit confused about what just happened and what might yet happen?

Encounters with God often have at least 3 features.

First, encounters with God happen to us in the ordinary events of daily life. David was tending sheep, as he had done many times before and would do many times after. Moses was also watching sheep when he encountered God near Mount Horeb (Exodus 3). In the New Testament, Mary was going about her daily household work when Gabriel visited her with a spectacular announcement (Luke 1).

Second, encounters with God surprise us. We do not expect them. They arrest our attention. Samuel, with his silent but—oh!—so life-changing anointing, astonished David. Moses certainly did not expect to see a bush that burned without burning up. No way did Mary ever dream of birthing a king. Saul, later called Paul, never imagined he would one day switch from persecuting Christians to joining them (Acts 9).

Third, encounters with God leave us a bit confused, uncertain what will happen next. Practically speaking, David had no idea how he was going to become king. Moses was bewildered about how to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. Mary was clueless how to mother a child later to be called the “Son of God.” Yet somehow each of these people found a way forward. At the right time, the path became clearer.

Encounters with God are paradoxical. They may disorient us, bless us, challenge us, comfort us, puzzle us. They happen in the ordinary but tilt life toward the extraordinary.

In your own encounters with God, what happened? What surprised you? What cheered you? What left you wondering in uncertainty? Most importantly, how did you respond to God?