# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“A Man after God’s Own Heart”**

**1 Samuel 13:1-14**

 **June 6, 2021**

Have you thought about your heart this morning? Although it weighs less than a pound, it beats about 100,000 times a day and is absolutely necessary for life. The God who created us wants us to have a healthy heart, both in the physical and in the spiritual sense. In the spiritual sense, the Bible uses the heart as a symbol for our inner life. Metaphorically speaking, our thoughts and our decision making originate in the heart, and God desires that our heart be guided by his thoughts and his decisions, that is, guided by his heart. To be a person after God’s own heart is to have a heart that is committed to doing the will of God; a heart that seeks to please God. The one human being who was perfectly after God’s own heart was Jesus, the one of whom the Father said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

This morning we begin our summer sermon series about a man who God declared to be after his own heart. While nowhere near the perfection of Jesus, David was committed to God and sought to please God. How can that be, we might ask? He is usually remembered for his sins, including committing adultery with Bathsheba and then ensuring her husband Uriah’s death. This is why the story of David is so instructive. As we read it from First and Second Samuel through our summer Bible reading plan and discuss it on Sunday mornings, my prayer is that you and I will discover what it means to be a person after God’s own heart. And, even more importantly, that we will strive to be such a person.

I am sure we all have a pretty good idea of how a compass works. The magnetized needle, rotating freely on a small post, will always line up with true north as it follows the direction of the earth’s natural magnetic field. Imagine, if you will, that the needle in the compass is our heart. When our heart has been magnetized, so to speak, by the Spirit of God, it will seek to line up with the heart of God. In this way, a person whose heart is after God’s own heart is a person whose thoughts and decisions will turn toward God’s. Because of sin we may ignore our true north and go in a different direction, but our heart will bring us back. David strayed but, as we will see, his heart brought him back to the Lord.

Today we will read together a passage not about David but about Saul, the man who was king before David. In Saul we have an example of a man whose heart was not pointing true north. Instead, he set the course for his life based on what he thought was best for himself. In so doing, he disobeyed God and suffered the consequences. I invite you to turn with me to 1 Samuel 13:1-14

Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned for forty-two years. Saul selected 3,000 special troops from the army of Israel and sent the rest of the men home. He took 2,000 of the chosen men with him to Micmash and the hill country of Bethel. The other 1,000 went with Saul’s son Jonathan to Gibeah in the land of Benjamin. Soon after this, Jonathan attacked and defeated the garrison of Philistines at Geba. The news spread quickly among the Philistines. So Saul blew the ram’s horn throughout the land, saying, “Hebrews, hear this! Rise up in revolt!” All Israel heard the news that Saul had destroyed the Philistine garrison at Geba and that the Philistines now hated the Israelites more than ever. So the entire Israelite army was summoned to join Saul at Gilgal. The Philistines mustered a mighty army of 3,000 chariots, 6,000 charioteers, and as many warriors as the grains of sand on the seashore! They camped at Micmash east of Beth-aven. The men of Israel saw what a tight spot they were in; and because they were hard pressed by the enemy, they tried to hide in caves, thickets, rocks, holes, and cisterns. Some of them crossed the Jordan River and escaped into the land of Gad and Gilead. Meanwhile, Saul stayed at Gilgal, and his men were trembling with fear. Saul waited there seven days for Samuel, as Samuel had instructed him earlier, but Samuel still didn’t come. Saul realized that his troops were rapidly slipping away. So he demanded, “Bring me the burnt offering and the peace offerings!” And Saul sacrificed the burnt offering himself. Just as Saul was finishing with the burnt offering, Samuel arrived. Saul went out to meet and welcome him, but Samuel said, “What is this you have done?” Saul replied, “I saw my men scattering from me, and you didn’t arrive when you said you would, and the Philistines are at Micmash ready for battle. So I said, ‘The Philistines are ready to march against us at Gilgal, and I haven’t even asked for the Lord’s help!’ So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering myself before you came.” “How foolish!” Samuel exclaimed. “You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you. Had you kept it, the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom must end, for the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart. The Lord has already appointed him to be the leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord’s command.”

In chapter ten verse eight of this book, Samuel, the prophet of God, had given Saul a clear command from God. Saul was to go to Gilgal and wait seven days until Samuel arrived. Upon arrival, Samuel would sacrifice offerings to God, and Saul would receive further instructions from God. But Saul’s heart is not intent on following God’s command. As troubles build around him, the thoughts of his heart become focused on the dangers. His troops are slipping away, the Philistines can mount an attack at any time, and Samuel has not showed up. And, with his thoughts not on God’s power and promises but on his circumstances, the decision of his heart is to take matters into his own hands. In direct disobedience of God’s command, he offers the sacrifice himself. That, in and of itself, is sinful, but what happens next is what sinks Saul.

“What have you done?” What have you done, Saul? What have you done, Adam? What have you done, Cain? What have you done, David? Instead of admitting his guilt, instead of confessing his weakness in allowing his circumstances to rule his heart rather than trusting God, Saul makes excuses. “My men were scattering, the Philistines were readying for battle, and besides, you didn’t show up in time.” “The woman you gave me, Lord, she is the one who gave me the fruit.” “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Their hearts were devoted not to God but to their own well-being, according to their own wisdom. But, then we come to David in a story we will explore in-depth later this summer. “What have you done, David, in your relationship with Bathsheba and Uriah?” “I have sinned.” David was a man after God’s own heart, and when confronted by his sin he confessed. While there would be consequences for his sin, there was also forgiveness and restoration. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me,” he prayed in his fifty-first psalm. Such is the prayer of a person whose heart is aligned with God’s heart.

A willingness to confess and repent are only a couple of the many characteristics of David we will explore this summer that will help us to understand what it means to be a person after God’s own heart. What we will also discover is that developing and living by this kind of heart is a life-long venture. And, God is not in a hurry. While our conversion from lost to saved takes place in a moment, the manufacture of a person after God’s own heart is the work of a lifetime. Your heart and my heart are works in progress, and the Spirit of God is ready to come alongside us these next three months to teach us how to love the Lord our God with *all* our hearts.