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Mother's Know
based on 1 Samuel 16:1-13
The anointing of David
a story told in the voice of David's mother
by Ralph Milton

Women so often get short-changed in the stories in the Bible. The story of how the prophet Samuel anointed the future King David is a case in point. Women were there, at least providing all the food and wine, and often managing events in subtle ways the men never suspected.

I can't change the Bible narrative, but I can deepen my understanding of the story by imagining how it might have been told by David's mom.

I'm a mother. I know these things.

Men get themselves so tied up with who is strongest, or most powerful, or wealthiest, but mothers see the heart. Like God.

Like when the old prophet Samuel came to our place in Bethlehem. At first the men folk are scared spitless.

Jesse, my husband keeps asking. "So what does this Samuel want with us?" Over and over. "So what does he want with us?" He gets the boys all excited. They wonder if maybe God is mad at them. Is Samuel maybe coming to pronounce judgement?

But old Samuel just limps down the road, leading a heifer and talking about making a sacrifice to God. He wants to hold a big prayer meeting. Fine. I get all the women of the village together and tell them, "Start cooking. When those men stop praying, they'll start eating."

I wonder, maybe, if praying is only an excuse to eat. Around here, our religion is in our stomach.

It doesn't take me long to figure that old Samuel has something up his sleeve besides a sacrifice to God. The men kill Samuel's heifer on the altar and sprinkle the blood as prescribed. They say all the right words and sing all the right songs and do all the right things. And when they're finished they're famished.

So us women bring out the food. We don't get to do the praying and we don't get to do the eating. But we *do* get to do the work.

But old Samuel he won't let them eat. "Not yet," he says. "Let me see your boys first." "What for?" Jesse wants to know.

Samuel gives him a dirty look. "That's not for you to know. Just bring your boys here, and let me look at them, one at a time."

So Jesse tells Eliab to step up. He stands there for the longest time while Samuel looks him over – up one side and down the other. Then I'm thinking, "Is Samuel looking for a new priest or prophet? Or what?"

Eliab and Jesse are thinking too. They maybe think Samuel is raising an army. So what do they know! Eliab starts flexing his muscles and Jesse starts bragging about how tough Eliab is, and Samuel says, "So, shut up already." Samuel waves Eliab off, and Jesse tells Abinadab to stand up.

Same routine. Abinadab is preening himself, trying to look handsome and tough.

"Cut it out, Abinadab," I think to myself. "I don't know what old Samuel is looking for, but I know it's not muscles." But of course, I can't say that. A woman's job is to cook, not to think. Right? Of course, right.

Jesse shows Samuel the seven oldest boys. They all do the same thing – acting tough, showing their muscles. Samuel is looking more and more ticked off. So what is this man looking for?

Then he talks. "God has not chosen any of these men – fine and handsome though they are. God looks to the heart."

Listen. There are times when a mama's instinct just clicks in. She understands. She acts. I'm wondering why Samuel is poking around here in Bethlehem looking for – whatever he's looking for. This is hardly even a town, it's so small. Jesse's tribe is the smallest of all the tribes. So what does this prophet want with us?

Right then I know. Samuel is not looking for muscles. Samuel wants a real *mensch*. He wants quality, passion. Samuel wants somebody with heart. *Chutzpah!* And brains to go with it. So I blurt it out before Jesse can stop me. "There's one more son. David. The youngest."

Samuel sits up real straight. "Bring that youngest son to me. We won't sit down to eat until I have met your youngest son."

Jesse is sitting there looking miffed. Jesse doesn't like David. "He's such a mama's boy," he often whines. "He sings songs 'n twangs on that harp 'n dreams dreams – he's **so** pretty."

It is true. My David has beautiful eyes. You should see his skin – so bright and clear and ruddy. His older brothers tease him and call him "sissy" and "mummy's pretty baby." But I can see things in David they don't see. God has plans for my boy. Mothers know these things. Right? Of course, right.

It doesn't take long for them to find David. He's in the wadi, just behind that hill. They bring him in, running, sweating. In his work clothes!

Old Samuel takes one look, then closes his eyes. I knew he was praying. Then slowly, his mouth whispering ancient and holy words, Samuel takes a horn and pours oil on David's head.

David never blinks. He was expecting this, maybe? He falls to his knees as the oil runs down his cheeks. His eyes meet the eyes of Samuel, and a holy fire passes between them.

Then Samuel just turns on his heel and walks away. David doesn't say anything either, not even to his mama. Off in the other direction. Back to his sheep.

Jesse is sitting there scratching his head. The older brothers start into the wine and the food. They have no idea. No idea.

I go back to my cooking pots. But I know. I know. God has seen the heart of my David, and called him to a fearful, holy destiny.

No one tells me these things. I am a mother. I know.

And I am afraid. Tonight, in the middle of the night, I will wake up and I will cry. And then I will pray to God to be careful with my David.

**Ralph Milton has written a number of books,
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