



Sermon preached by Revd Richard Church on 15th March 2026

Readings: *1 Samuel 16: 1-13; Ephesians ; 8-14; John 9: 1-41*

Lent IV

SHARING TOGETHER

This Sunday is the fourth Sunday in the season of Lent. It is sometimes called Laetare ('rejoice!') Sunday, a day of celebration within the austere period of Lent. "Rejoice, O Jerusalem" is from Isaiah 66:10.

We are halfway through the season of Lent. We have been thinking about Jesus and all that he went through for us. Christians around the world have also been sharing in this season which began the day after Pancake Day, when some people went to Church and had a cross of ash marked on their foreheads to remind them of Jesus' suffering. So it's a very serious season. But here we are at half time. In football at half time the teams leave the pitch and go to their changing rooms to relax before coming back to try to win the match on the pitch. This Sunday is a bit like that. We take a break from the struggle to be more like Jesus and are given reasons to rejoice.

Here are three reasons to be joyful.

1. From the reading, Samuel 16. David was the youngest son, given the task of looking after the family's sheep. He didn't even get called in when a visitor came. I wonder if you have ever felt overlooked by your family or friends. How did that feel? BUT it turned out that David was the boy chosen to be king. Yes, think of that, in from the fields, smelling of sheep, overlooked by his dad and his brothers but the visitor marked him out as the future king.
Rejoice, even when others don't rate you, God does and has a plan for your life.
2. At school in the class or out on the sports field, people might look at you and think that you won't amount to much. Perhaps you can't read as quickly as some others or manage numbers as well. Perhaps with a ball you feel as if you have two left feet and always kick it in the wrong direction or worse still never get the ball passed to you in the first place.
Rejoice. People, even your friends, just see what's on the outside. BUT God sees what's in your heart.
3. It is very usual for us to feel that we can't do things. David must have felt the same especially when he heard that he was to be made a king. I am too young. I don't have any experience ruling over people. Maybe you have felt that you can't do something that seems to be expected of you. We are told that the Spirit of the Lord came upon David.
Rejoice. If God calls you to do something. He will equip you. David became a giant killer! I wonder what you might do in your life. With God's Spirit within you, you will be able to overcome all the obstacles and surprise yourself as you allow God to strengthen and encourage you.

SERMON

This morning, I want to examine the quality of **integrity** through individuals whom we have met through scripture, and ask about its origin, its quality and how it connects with us as people who are seeking to serve and follow Jesus.

First on this Mothering Sunday, a testimony from Michelle Obama. 'My mother's love has always been a sustaining force for our family, and one of my greatest joys is seeing her integrity, her compassion, her intelligence reflected in my daughters.' In other words, integrity is exhibited often in those we observe, and it inspires others.

Jesse, whose house Samuel the prophet visited, to anoint David as King was the great grandson of Ruth and Boaz. Ruth, the young Moabite widow who accompanies her mother-in-law Naomi to Judah. Boaz,

who provided safety and provision for the two women was known for his integrity. Obed, son of Boaz was known as 'servant' or 'worshipper'. Whilst it is undoubtedly true that one does not inherit integrity, the biblical account here is demonstrating how in each generation of this family men and women were known as righteous people within Israel. When baby Obed was laid in Naomi's lap, the women of Bethlehem told her 'that child would renew your life and sustain you in your old age!'

So, we come to David, Jesse's youngest son. Despite a veritable array of seven promising young men, Samuel asks Jesse for another. I came across a Syrian Synagogue wall painting from 2nd-3rd century showing a queue of Jesse's sons all looking decidedly glum that they had not been chosen! We are told that Samuel thought Eliab would be the chosen one, but the Lord said to the prophet: Don't look at his appearance or his height, for the Lord does not look as human beings do – they look outwardly but the Lord looks on the heart.

The origin of what we call integrity, but the Bible might refer to as righteousness, is the state of being in a right relationship with God.

Our second case study of integrity, in John 9, concerns the man born blind. Here the question about why this man is as he is, is right there at the beginning of the chapter as the disciples want to know why the man was born blind. It's a complete irony that they were focussed on what he or his parents had done wrong to account for his disability when in fact this man is the only figure in the story who emerges as a person who simply witnesses to the truth. His parents prevaricate, some of the crowd question whether it is the same man, and the Pharisees wanted to contest the healing because they could not entertain the idea that in Jesus the long-awaited Messiah had come among them.

John 9 sees the blind man resisting enormous pressure to play down his healing or to bow before religious orthodox authority by calling Jesus a sinner. Instead, he remains a faithful witness: One thing I do know that though I was blind now I see. Much has been written about the writer of the Gospel playing theologically with themes of light and darkness and certainly here it is the man born blind who has physical and spiritual vision, just as it is the Pharisees who can physically see what's going on around them but have no spiritual insight into the nature of Jesus and his mission.

Without the testimony of the Gospels how many extraordinary actions by ordinary people would we not know about, and for that matter how many heroic actions now are hidden from our sight. This man had been made an outcast. When Jesus caught up with him, he is ready to make his first profession of faith in Jesus. As Oprah Winfrey has said: Real integrity is doing the right thing knowing that nobody's going to know whether you did it or not. Like the anonymous woman who dropped her coins into the temple collecting box, or the little boy who offered his packed lunch to Jesus, or Nicodemus who at the end of honest wrestling with faith provided spices to anoint the dead.

What we see in Jesus is the light of God embodied. His light always issued in actions, and he calls us to do the same, to be inspired by the same unity of purpose. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. I drive frequently on rural roads in Cambridgeshire and especially in autumn and winter nights I have been so thankful for the cats eyes in the middle of the road which give me early warning of a change of direction to right or left. But the point is that only as I get closer do I discern the direction.

The origin of biblical righteousness, part of which I have been calling integrity, is a gift which comes through faith. It does not advertise itself but is quietly persistent in sticking to principles in a changing world, as President Jimmy Carter once put it. I began by making references to mothers and grandmothers and it is often in them that this dignity and quiet integrity is seen. But each believer is lit up, a reflector, to guide others, of the light of Jesus constantly shining, and always inspiring us to travel more closely with him. Amen

Richard Church
15 March 2026