Good morning! This sermon has been printed as a worship aid for those who would like to read along with the sermon. Please know that I have taken this sermon down to an outline form and am preaching from the outline, so what I preach will be different! Also, this version is not edited for printing as much as sermon preparation, so please excuse typos and where I have typed my stream of consciousness! Please do not make copies of and distribute this version. We have our sermons in written form as well as audio on our website. Later this week we should have a version of today’s sermon: www.wpc-decatur.org/sermons  Blessings, Pastor Shannon

How many people are project people? You have a vision of how something will end up and know how to get there?

There was a father who walked into the kitchen and saw a disaster. There was stuff on every surface in the kitchen. Tools. Supplies. Paint. Trash. Unidentified pieces of wood attached together; the father freaked out a little bit at the chaos in the room. However, when he asked his son, who seemed to be in the midst of the mess, the son was able to easily show how each seemingly unrelated piece would fit into the final project. It wasn’t a mess; it was just uncompleted. The son knew what the end project would be.

The prayer I just read is the result of quite a bit of the story of David.

This week we read in the Story the first part of David’s life. Our chapter started with God telling Samuel to anoint a new king to replace Saul. Samuel goes to Bethlehem and to the home of Jesse. Jesse and his family are not a big deal. They are not local aristocracy. They are a normal family. There is a great scene where all of David’s older brothers are brought before Samuel. Eliab is the oldest, and Samuel is ready to choose him, but not God. He is rejected by God. It is here that God says the words that humans look at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. (1Sam. 16:7) Each time one of the older brothers walks by, Samuel says that the son is not the one that God is looking for. Finally, all of the sons who are there are presented to Samuel, and Samuel still hasn’t found the one that God has chosen. Samuel asks if there is maybe another. The response is that the youngest is tending sheep.

David is the younger son, and not one the first guesses for who will be king. Someone from Bethlehem was not expected. A son of Jesse wasn’t expected. And the youngest son was certainly not expected. The most likely would be the first-born son. As a matter of fact, the Hebrew word for how Eliab was turned down was the same language as God had used when he took his favor from Saul. Those of us who have been following The Story will also think of others who were not first-born sons…like Jacob and Joseph.
They sent for David, who is a shepherd. People hearing this story in that day would have made a connection that David being a shepherd is a foreshadowing of David being king, because kings in that time were often called shepherds. The shepherd will be a SHEPHERD.

Right after David is anointed by God, we go to the David and Goliath story. This is one of my very favorite Bible stories as it speaks to me on many levels. I preached on it last October when it popped up in our lectionary. I love how David shows up on the battlefield and annoys his older brothers. I even love how his brothers treat him as a bratty little brother. Can’t you imagine how this family story was told in years to come. “Yeah, your Uncle David was this bratty kid and when he showed up at the battle, your uncle Eliab actually told him to shut up and go home! Ha ha! And then HE KILLED GOLIATH!!!” Can’t you just picture it?

There are many things I love about this story. I love how the least of these has the faith in God’s power and that the ones who SHOULD have had that faith didn’t. I love how God uses the times that David had really bad days as a shepherd, when lions and bears attacked, to equip him, prepare him for his battle with Goliath. I also love the vignette of Saul offering David his armor. As I shared before, this vignette has been powerful for me in my ministry as it is a great reminder that God calls and equips all types of people with all different skill sets. I don’t have to do things the same way someone else would. In this part of the story, it has been decided that the boy, David, would go take on Goliath. It is a big deal! If he loses, then Israel will be subject to the rule of the Philistines. Saul offers David his weighty and too large armor, and it doesn’t fit. It is too heavy for the boy, David. David turns down the offer of the armor and goes and does things his own way. Probably the only way that would defeat the giant.

From there the story continues on to David becoming part of Saul’s household and a commander in his army. David becomes so successful that Saul becomes jealous of David. So, David goes out on his own. Saul pursues David to kill him. David refuses to kill Saul, even when he has the chance. David promises to not kill Saul. David knows he is going to be king, and all that stands in his way of becoming a king instead of a fugitive is Saul. Yet he trusts God’s ways and timing, and God arranges it that Saul actually kills himself. That’s a whole sermon right there! Our chapter this week ends with David’s prayer that I just read.

There were many challenges for David to get to the point that he could pray this prayer. There were many challenges before David could really understand the gift that God had given him.

The prayer begins with David praying: “Who am I, Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?”

The people who did the Story laid out the sermon plan backing up from Easter and skipping Advent. I didn’t pick this passage for this week for casting a vision for Westminster in 2020, but God have me an awesome passage!

I want to tweak this verse to say on behalf of our church: “Who are we, Sovereign Lord, and what is our congregation, that you have brought us this far?”
We have come so far this year. From new faces in our congregation, to ongoing repairs on our building, to new ministry outreach areas, we are learning where God wants us at this time in the life of our church.

Next week we will be celebrating Thanksgiving. We at Westminster have so much to be thankful for. We will celebrate the ultimate thanksgiving meal in communion. We will celebrate and give thanks as we accept into membership new members. We will also have the opportunity to celebrate and give thanks by pledging our commitment to support Westminster in her ministry and mission next year through our financial giving and the giving of our time and talents.

I am so excited for this next phase in the life of Westminster. I want to ask you to join John and me in supporting the church financially, so that we can realize the vision God has given our church leadership for Westminster.

You all are very faithful givers. You are extremely generous and step up whenever it is needed. I am so thankful. I do want to make sure you know the difference you are making here by giving to Westminster.

First and foremost, you are worshipping God with your gifts. By giving back to God with each pay check or income statement we can say God is indeed first. God is first in my spending and my saving and my giving. It is a way to regularly remind ourselves that God cares about more than just Sunday morning, but cares all week with every decision we make.

Secondly, it is a discipline that helps us balance our spending, therefore reducing our stress. To tithe, or give more than an afterthought, we need to plan our budget. This means we have to spend less than we make, and budgeting is proven to help people to spend less, save more and give as led. Our bills are not a surprise. We know week to week what we spend and what we make, and we adjust to fit. It is a great way to live, regardless of your income levels. This summer I preached about the formula that we were taught when we got married. The first 10% goes to God. The next 10% goes to savings. Live on the rest. You may not be able to do that right now, but what decisions can you make to get a bit closer? You may have fixed costs and a fixed income and may not be able to just decide to follow the formula, and that is fine. I do encourage all of you to join me by intentionally reflecting on any gift you give as a gift to God and asking God to use it for transformation, both personal transformation and through the ministries of the church. You may give the same amount as you did last year. Obviously, if you want to give more, great! But no matter the amount, if you can do so more as a spiritual discipline, a spiritual practice, as a way to connect with God, and not just one of your other bills, that would give me joy!

Third, when you give to Westminster you are giving to a church that cares about children, not just the ones here on Sunday mornings, but even more on Wednesday night. Westminster is also very generous in supporting children at local schools. This year we supported the children at the Presbyterian Children’s Home, the Boys and Girls Club and kids at Banks Caddell Elementary school. This coming year we are planning on being even more supportive of the needs of children in area schools with school supplies, meeting classroom needs and becoming reading buddies.
Finally, when you give to Westminster you are not only providing a place and leadership for worship on Sunday mornings, but you are providing pastoral care to those who are in crisis. I not only meet with you all when you need me, but there are several in the community with whom I meet when they need someone who cares, but don’t have someone else to call. Some of these people are church refugees, hurt by other churches. I hope to listen and let them know God cares, and God loves them no matter what. You are providing hospital visits. You are providing coaching and support for our various teams and committees. You are providing outreach to the community. You are providing a place for community organizations to meet. You are providing a place for this particular group of people to continue to come together and learn and practice how to do Jesus and Christianity together as a unique Body of Christ.

I sent a letter out this week talking about my vision for Westminster as a safe place for all of us to grow into mature Christians and then share what we receive from the Holy Spirit with others. I picked the sunflower motif as I see them as growing, beautiful, and productive—things that I believe they have in common with Westminster. I picked the photo on the front of this bulletin this morning as it shows unrealized potential. We may not be the biggest church in Decatur or even on this street! But we have a great deal of potential. In 2020 I want us to realize more of that potential. We are healthy. We are growing. We are making a difference. I want to continue that into 2020, and I hope you will join me in this exciting time!

David is thanking God for how God will use his family for the good of others. I thank God many times a week for how God is using Westminster to make a difference in the lives of others. I thank God for how God is leading us into this next year and am thankful to God and for each of you and can’t wait to see what God has planned for us. We are a work in progress. However, God can clearly see how God will use us to God’s glory. We are not a mess. We are not chaos. We are pieces and parts that God is putting together as his masterpiece, here at Westminster Presbyterian Church.