

“David and Goliath: A Stone’s Throw Away”

1 Samuel 17

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Goliath is a seasoned soldier. A man of many battles: winner of all, loser of none. He’s 9 feet tall with an ego to match. His impenetrable Armor itself weighs as much as a high school fullback. It is buffed brass that shines as bright as the noonday sun. Giant Goliath Bellows across the valley, making every Israelite’s knee’s knock in their little tin trousers.

From the King on down, everybody is terrified, save one. Little David. What does David have going for him? His cheeks are so pink, his older brothers ridicule him about it. They call him Pinky. His head has not yet grown to catch up with his ears, so his ears stick out like Will Smith. In fact, he spends most of his time dreaming, practicing songs on his guitar. David is no macho man. He was not even in the army.

The only reason he is there is that his father wants a report on how the battle is going. So his father uses big eared, pink cheeked David as a delivery boy. He sends him to deliver to the king some cheese. We are not told what kind of cheese. Cheddar? Munster? Brie? Feta? Velveeta? The Bible does not tell us that. The point is David is a delivery boy with some cheese for the general, As an excuse to get some gossip for his father.

David hears Goliath’s taunts booming, echoing across the valley. Now, I do not want to psychoanalyze David. Nevertheless... I think it is important to remember that David had 7 – Count them – SEVEN – OLDER brothers. Those of you who have had the distinct honor of having ANY older brothers Know what that means. What an older brother calls “playing,” A younger sibling calls, “crimes against humanity.”

And while David brags about facing down lions and bears, we know that what equally prepared him for battle against the giant Goliath Was having SEVEN older brothers. All far bigger, all far stronger. David did not know it, but he had been preparing for this Goliath moment his whole life. When David hears the taunts of this bigger, older, bully, inside his head, a little switch flips. And all those years of repressed little brother rage find their DESTINY. That pent-up righteous indignation finds its true voice: “How dare you insult the armies of the Living God!

So when no one else will step forward, David says, “Oh yeah. Here I am Lord, please, send me!” King Saul won’t go. He is rattling inside of his tin can armor. Intimidated by the giant, Saul thinks: If I give this kid my armor, it is like he will be my champion, my representative. People will think he is fighting in my place.” “Here kid, put on my armor.”

Saul's armor looks on the outside like Goliath's armor, except Saul's is the cheap, dime store knockoff armor. We know it won't last a minute in a real battle. But little rosy-cheeked David is wise. He knows that he is NOT King Saul, AND He does not Want to be. When you are fighting a giant, You can't pretend to be someone you are not. And, to put on this type of armor would be like doing exactly what Goliath had done, which is to allow the Philistines to set the terms of battle.

Primary rule of conflict management: "Never let the Philistines set the terms of battle." That is an important rule in secular conflict or in church conflict. "Never let the Philistines set the terms of battle." You see, if you are going to fight a giant, don't do it on someone else's terms. Fight with the gifts God gives to you!

Goliath steps out for battle. He is the Philistine version of shock and awe. He's got a bronze spear as big as a flagpole. He's got bronze hat, bronze coat, bronze pants, bronze shoes, and bronze socks. He is one color coordinated giant. GQ giant of the year: best dressed AND most terrifying. He has the power of terror, the power of fear. But David has the power of the armies of the living God. Therefore David knows an army of 1 -- plus God -- constitutes a majority.

Because God is always on the side of the oppressed longing to be free. David, little pinky, standing there all alone. With his sling shot and his big Will Smith ears flapping in the breeze. David shouts: Goliath, you've got a big mouth. I'm gonna close it once and for all. And after I finish with you nobody's gonna wear those silly bronze socks or that silly orange hair for a thousand years."

Then David picked up a handful of stones and got ready for target practice. His next move is breathtaking. You would think he would wait, Put off the confrontation as long as possible, try to hide, Maneuver for position, Something, anything to delay, hold back, hide out.

But instead, little David RUNS straight at Goliath! Goliath did not even have time to put down his visor. TOSS! BOOM! BAM! Goliath is down on the ground. The battle is over before most people knew it started.

After a month of Israel's whole army shaking in their boots, Little David reveals to them that when God is with you: Victory is just a stone's throw away. David saw what the whole army and the people of Israel did not. Victory was just a stone's throw away.

In this story: The people of Israel are looking, but they are not seeing. They are hearing, but not listening. They are alive, but not alert. They confuse appearances with reality.

Tobacco companies selling a product that causes cancer, would fund their own studies on tobacco, to confuse appearances with reality. The Goliath's of this world want to distract us from reality with the glitter, pomp and loud mouths. If the church is to take on Goliath's of our day, we need to look not at appearances, but discerningly look at matters of the heart of what is real.

One of the 6 goals of the Presbyterian Church throughout its history is the dedication not to appearances, not to distracting Goliath moves, but a dedication to discerning the TRUTH. The agents of God are to mediate both grace and judgment. Discerning what is really going on in the world. And then, to aim the rock of ages where it belongs: squarely in the middle of Goliath's forehead.

Goliath trying to set the terms of battle, trying to define what is real, what is true. That is not his job: that is ours.

Remember: the end of this story, the part we don't read in Sunday School. First Goliath lost his mind with arrogance. Then skinny David takes Goliath's own sword lifts it up over Goliath's head and gives a case study in those who live by the sword will die by the sword. Which is to say, first Goliath lost his mind with arrogance. Then his ideas were cut off from future generations. Because he was just another Pharaoh trying to enslave people.

About this David and Goliath story someone may ask you: Did that really happen? If they do, you ask back the far more interesting question: Not "Did it really happen," But, how many times has it happened?

The world's greatest General, Alexander the Great was defeated by one little kidney stone.

Napoleon, the greatest general in Europe, met his Waterloo Because of one unexpected muddy ditch.

The Montgomery bus boycott that kicked off the whole Civil Right movement.

Scotland's Robert the Bruce defeated the army of the King of England at Bannockburn with pointy sticks and a swamp.

In the Civil Rights movement, David's story happened because a washer woman who had spent her time in Sunday School class, where they were studying about nonviolent protest, gathered up her stones, then Rosa Parks, stood up to the system by sitting down on a bus. It came crashing down.

South Africa's apartheid rule fell because one convict behind bars, Nelson Mandela, sat on his prison bench as if it was bench of the Supreme Court.

Is this story true? It is true every day that a person of faith faces some well-dressed, well-financed, seemingly all-powerful Goliath, and decides that victory is just a stone's throw away.

And it is an old, old story about an important truth— that God goes with us, walks beside us whenever we step out onto the field to go up against a powerful and intimidating foe.

Walter Brueggemann says Goliath is a symbol for everything that is fierce and intimidating and frightening.

So let Goliath be whatever threatens you, whatever makes you feel small and weak and vulnerable. Whatever immobilizes you. When you find yourself in a situation coming up against a giant so powerful you are paralyzed by fear—the disease that threatens you, the surgery that makes you afraid, the threat of unemployment, your loss of your confidence. One rejection after another. The loss of a friend, a loved one, a dear one, fear of the future, fear of intimacy fear of failure, fear of risk, fear of loneliness. Let Goliath be that final fear —the power of death itself—

And then remember: This is our story. This is our reality. John Buchanon says the giants that we face in our lives are not always as powerful or impregnable as we may have been led to believe. Yes, we face formidable challenges in our relationships, our vocations, our health, our nation.

And yet, despite the press clippings and mortality charts and the whole host of "experts," we often find that our adversary is not all-powerful.

David ran toward the giant because faith gave him power. That is our story. David is our ancestor. The power of his faith is in our spiritual DNA. But, perhaps for many of us, we feel as though we are still sitting on the edge of the valley of the shadow, unsure of how God will show up. Remember: this is a matter of life and death. Remember: Goliath's ways lead to death and chaos. The Bible says: Goliath's ways lead to slavery: Which is to say servile spirit, injustice, cages. How will we emerge out of this battle? Look around you, not through the eyes of appearances, but through the eyes of faith.

What resources do we have against such power? The things on our side may appear to be pebbles, but these things God has given us have unfathomable power when hurled in the direction of the Goliath's of our world.

We have the stones of:

Hope

Love,

Grace,

Goodness

Generosity,

Kindness, Compassion,

Willingness to Sacrifice

Wisdom

Divine laughter

And don't ever forget that tiny stone that comes from the power of our democracy, you have the power to vote. There are rocks all around us. When God is on our side, there are more resources at our command than any Goliath can ever perceive. We are the spiritual children of David. Nothing is impossible for us when we run TOWARD the problem instead of running away. Some say, the problem is too large. How can we? We say: How can we NOT? Anything less is to PRETEND that God does not matter.

So gather your stones together. Then AIM HIGH. Don't let the giant's words scare you. Don't let your pink cheeks and Will Smith ears stop you. David shows us the Bigger they are, the harder they fall.

So picture it in your mind. Get ready. Expect: When the time comes: YOU will run right at that Goliath problem, Wind up and hurl your pebbles, and that loudmouth giant, and his whole loudmouthed army Will come tumbling down. A new world in Jesus Christ will open up. All we have to do is to remember David is our ancestor; we have his spiritual power running through our veins. All we have to do, as that wonderful hymn says, is "Fight the Good Fight."

Gather those stones. Get ready. Because victory is just a stone's throw away.

Amen.