

Sermon, August 7, 2022

1 Samuel 17:38-49  
"David and Goliath"

The story of David and Goliath takes place in a time of transition in the history of Israel moving from a time of biblical judges, to becoming a unified kingdom with Saul as its first king. Saul was very popular among the people, but that would be short-lived. He had a volatile temper and was mentally unstable. He was also prone to fits of depression, which could only be soothed through music. That is a primary reason why David was called to his court, as David had a reputation as a gifted musician. Eventually, Saul would become jealous of David's own popularity, began to see him as a rival, and try to have him killed.

It is not known how long Saul's reign was, but it was entirely plagued by war. In today's story the Israelites are at war with the Philistines. The Philistines, according to the Book of Genesis, were descended from an Egyptian people known as the Casluhites, although that is debated among scholars. They also worshipped various deities such as Baal, Asherah, and Dagon, which may have been part of the hostilities between them and the Israelites, who worshipped the one God, Yahweh. Beginning in the Book of Judges they appear to be in perpetual warfare with the Israelites.

As the story goes, a champion of the Philistines named Goliath came forward and said that if any Israelite could kill him, they would become their servants. According to the text Goliath stood "six cubits and a span". Biblical scholars' debate what that means. He could have been anywhere from 6ft.nine to 9ft.nine. Anyway, you cut it, he was very big!

David came forward to meet the challenge. Saul at first said no, as David was just a boy, but eventually gave in, and clothed David with his armor. But David found the armor too cumbersome and took it off. Instead, he took his staff in hand, chose five smooth stones, and placed them in his shepherd's bag, with his sling in his hand.

David then kills Goliath with one swift stone to the forehead, and then proceeds to chop off Goliath's head.

So, what does this story mean for us? First, from a biblical point of view, it was intended to show that David was more suited to be king, than was Saul, and that Yahweh was superior to

the Philistine's pagan gods. But if we read the story allegorically, we begin to see it personally, both as individuals and as a congregation.

I believe that we have all at one time or another faced Goliath - not necessarily in the form of a giant military opponent, but as a challenge or obstacle in our lives that seemed to be insurmountable. Goliath may have appeared in the form of a relational, or perhaps, financial challenge. Maybe he came in the form of a serious illness, a mental or physical disability, an addiction, bouts of depression. He can appear before us in any form that makes it seem almost impossible to see light at the end of an existential tunnel. To overcome such obstacles requires courage, perseverance, and, above all, faith - faith in ourselves, and faith in God. I'm sure that when David stood before Goliath there must have been a moment when fear stepped in. Who would not in the face of someone so frightening? There may even been moments of doubt concerning his own ability to win. He was, after all, human. But still he stood firm, grounded in the belief that God was on his side. We too, as individuals and as a congregation, must look to the future confident in the knowledge that God is on our side - keeping in mind that Jesus said that faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains.

Of course, we do have to be careful about the belief that God is on our side. The unfortunate reality is that throughout the course of history much evil has been done in God's name. We may think of the Crusades and Spanish Inquisition, the 17th century witch trials, the institution of slavery, the displacement and genocide of Indigenous people, and the Holocaust, as just a few examples of evils perpetrated by those who believed God was on their side. God is on the side of that which is virtuous, that which has to do with justice and peace, that which uplifts the dignity of the downtrodden, that which aims for the preservation and health of Creation, that which is compassionate, merciful, and grounded in love.

Now, if you look to the image of David standing before Goliath without armor, it speaks of his vulnerability. And if you read a little earlier in the story you see that Goliath was covered in armor from head to toe, which adds to his image of invincibility. But he did have one point of vulnerability, i.e., his forehead, which is where David struck him with a stone. This should tell us that when we face our own Goliaths, if we look hard enough, and place our trust in God, we too can find points of vulnerability in the challenges before us - a place where possibility reveals itself, and, hopefully, informs us that we may not be as vulnerable as we think we are

Possibility - that is the key word here - we need pray to God that we can see possibilities even when things look impossible. Steven Charleston, former Episcopal Bishop of Alaska, and an elder in the Choctaw Nation, writes, "Faith is perception. It is how we see. If we see the world around us as nothing but darkness - a darkness we believe we cannot change - then darkness is what we get. But if we see darkness while we believe in light - a light we cannot see but know is there - then we get something new: we get possibility - the possibility of change. It all comes down to trust."

We have to place our trust in God when Goliath stands before us in his many forms. We must trust that the Spirit of the Lord can reveal to us light in the midst of darkness and show us possibility where no possibility appears to be. Amen.

**Let us pray:** God of infinite possibilities, we come before you today, placing out trust in you, believing that you can reveal light to us, even in our darkest hours. Your Son Jesus taught us that just a little bit of faith can make the impossible possible. Help us to find such faith within ourselves. Lead us that we may place our trust in you, revealing to us new ways of seeing the world. We live in troubling times but know that your Spirit can guide us in the direction of a better world. Teach us how to best meet the challenges before us. Grant us a vision of a brighter future and reveal to us the pathways we need to walk in order to get there. Believing in your grace, we place our trust in you. Amen.