

Proper 7B  
June 21, 2009  
**1 Samuel 17:32-49**

### **Victory in God's Name**

The story of David and Goliath may be the most well-known of all of the David stories, but in my 20+ years sitting on the organ bench during my church music days, I don't think I ever heard a sermon preached on this well-known and well-loved story. I wonder why not? The violence of this story may be especially troubling to some, because it is through violence that David established himself as a force in King Saul's court. Troubling to many also is that the Old Testament seems to endorse this violence. Many prefer to relate to God as revealed in Jesus "meek and mild." We gravitate toward a Mother Theresa or Mahatma Gandhi model of interacting with injustice. Violence and death somehow don't fit the "image" of a faithful man of God.

Think about that. Doesn't that strike you as very odd – that many would shy away from the violence and gore of David and Goliath and yet the empty cross is planted at the very center of our faith?

And then, if you've heard this story preached at all, most likely it has been domesticated into a morality tale about the "little guy" overcoming the "big guy." Whenever there is a mighty upset in athletics, this story provides the framework in which the sports journalists invite us to understand the result. Even the Christian video series "Veggie Tales" turns the message of this story into a story about how "little guys can do big things, too." The myth of the rugged individual who draws on secret stores of courage to overcome powerful obstacles is woven into the very fabric of our society.

If this story should not be understood as one about a lone individual overcoming a giant obstacle, then how should we understand it? Can we as a parish hear a word of encouragement as we face those giants of budget deficits and deteriorating church buildings?

Personally, I'm finding this long summer gaze into David's life to be enormously helpful as we seek God's guidance for the future of our parish. Let's let God speak to us in three ways this morning. First, I'll look at some obvious growth in David's character. Then, I'll look at his source of power. Finally, I'll close by paying attention to David's choice of weapons in his confrontation of Goliath. Off we go to the battle drawn up between the army of Saul and the Philistines.

1. Last week, we first met David as the youngest of the 8 sons of Jesse, not a prominent family in the tribe of Benjamin. David was summoned from the pastures where he was tending his father's sheep by the prophet Samuel. Samuel anointed David at Bethlehem as the future King of Israel. There, God first "provided" for the future of this fragile, emerging nation. David had a very passive role in this gracious act of provision. He never spoke a word.

Now, in chapter 17, David reveals a talent for both speech and action. He is not just the object of the author's description. His powerful speeches to Saul (vvs. 34-37) and to Goliath (vvs. 45-47) form the heart of this story. His actions are reported throughout the chapter, but especially in the climactic moment of the battle with Goliath. David has become a man of bold and effective action.

David ran ... put his hand ... took out a stone ... slung it ... struck.

What implications does the development of David's character from a passive recipient of God's anointing to a young man active in speech and deed have for us as a community of faith?

I think it's obvious. It's time for many of us to "step up to the plate" (to use baseball jargon) and move into bold speech and action. I have to believe that each person sitting here this morning has a good notion of what God would have you say and do on behalf of the vibrant present and future of this parish. Brush those fears aside and move into action.

2. Thankfully, neither David then nor we now move into purposeful word and action under our own steam, for our own behalf. Listen to what David spoke to Goliath:

*<sup>46</sup>This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, ... so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, <sup>47</sup>and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand.'*

Goliath had, day after day, been "defying the ranks of Israel." Goliath was asserting continually that the God of the Israelites had no power to save their armies and bring them to victory. That was blasphemy against God. David was absolutely not willing to allow those taunts to go on. By referring to Goliath as "this uncircumcised Philistine," David was placing Goliath's challenge in a covenantal context. Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Israel. David understood Goliath's challenge to involve not merely flesh and blood armies, but the God of Abraham, who had promised Abraham that his descendants would be both blessed and a blessing. Seen in this light, the story of David and Goliath may be interpreted as a story about faith in the living God who makes and keeps covenants with human beings – even when keeping the covenant seems unlikely or impossible. The Israelites could look back to the Exodus as the pattern of how God acts on behalf of His beloved ones.

Does that sentence speak to you personally? Are you able to use words other than "coincidence" and "lucky" to describe powerful experiences of rescue – in any/all areas of your life? Was it just "luck" that Ray and I met at the registration table, the fall of 1973 at the University of Iowa? Are you able to confidently speak of a Power-greater-than-yourself, God – that is actively working on your behalf to form you more and more into His image? If this is true in your life, can we not joyously proclaim that God is actively working in His Body, the Church? Pray for an active sense of God's Holy Spirit working in and through our parish.

3. Finally, what weapons did David use to confront and defeat Goliath? In the end, David neither wanted nor could he wear Saul's protective armor. Wisely, David opted for that weapon that he knew and that had served him well in the past. He relied on no secret weapon or strategy. God had gifted David with skill in the use of a sling-shot. That proved sufficient.

What do we think that we need as a parish to survive and thrive now and into the future? Do we need massive numbers, large budgets, a huge Sunday school? Is that what we think we need? Are you willing to entertain the thought that we have all we need right now, right here? Could God be encouraging us to use to good advantage the time, talent and treasure that He has already gifted us with? I look at David – at Goliath – and notice that David has a well-used sling-shot in his hand.

God is challenging us here today to become people of word and action who trust in God's promise to provide and protect. God is challenging us to notice and effective use the sling-shot He has gifted each of us with. To the battle lines!

### **1 Samuel 17:32-49**

<sup>32</sup>David said to Saul, 'Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.' <sup>33</sup>Saul said to David, 'You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth.' <sup>34</sup>But David said to Saul, 'Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, <sup>35</sup>I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. <sup>36</sup>Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God.' <sup>37</sup>David said, 'The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.' So Saul said to David, 'Go, and may the Lord be with you!'

<sup>38</sup>Saul clothed David with his armour; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. <sup>39</sup>David strapped Saul's sword over the armour, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, 'I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them.' So David removed them. <sup>40</sup>Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

<sup>41</sup>The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. <sup>42</sup>When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. <sup>43</sup>The Philistine said to David, 'Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?' And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. <sup>44</sup>The Philistine said to David, 'Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field.' <sup>45</sup>But David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. <sup>46</sup>This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, <sup>47</sup>and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand.'

<sup>48</sup>When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly towards the battle line to meet the Philistine. <sup>49</sup>David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.