

1 Samuel 17:11, 32-37, 45-47, 49

“Old Stories for a New Day: David & Goliath” (In This Corner...)

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Rev. Lou Nyiri

Of all the Old Stories for a New Day we’re looking at this summer – today’s story – David & Goliath – is probably the best known of all the stories of David. It has been said of this story that, “People who have no religious background or biblical knowledge recognize and know the broad outlines of the story of David and Goliath.” (*New Interpreters Bible Commentary, vol. II, p. 1108*)

Moreover, within the context of the book of 1 Samuel this story occupies a special position. It is the most detailed in the telling of all the stories of David. One writer has described this story within the Hebrew Bible as coming “as close one can to an epic style of storytelling – rich and explicit detail extensive use of vivid dialogue, strong characterization and interaction of characters.” (*Quoting Robert Alter in NIBC, vol. II, p. 1108*)

At the center of this epic drama emerges David whose bold & decisive action and unwavering faith capture our imagination. David is unquestionably the man for Israel’s future, and as the popularity of the story suggests he becomes also a man for future generations as well.

The irony of that statement is that he’s not a man when this story happens.

To set the scene, let’s recall what has preceded this morning’s text:

The Philistines are back & they pose a relentless threat to Israel’s future.

Both parties are encamped on opposite ridges with a valley in between.

Into the valley steps a man – Goliath of Gath – who challenges Israel.

The terms of the challenge are a fight to the death.

The result of the challenge is the losing combatant’s side becomes servants to the opposing army.

And in good WWF or UFC style, rather than move right into the battle, we move into the pre-fight hype...

You can almost hear the ring announcer step into the valley below and bark out, “In this corner,” as he motions toward Goliath, “standing at 9’9” (or 6’9” by lesser standards of measurement – both of which though are impressive) is *The Bombastic Bully* – Goliath of Gath!” Then it moves into a description of Goliath’s attire – perhaps now it shifts from UFC ring announcer to Oscar Red Carpet fashionista, “Did you see what Goliath is wearing? Helmet of Bronze, and a coat of mail that weighs 5,000 shekels of bronze (150 lbs), legs covered in greaves of bronze, and between his shoulder blades a javelin of bronze.”

At the end of this description you get a portrait depicting an invulnerable warrior – dressed from head-to-toe in state-of-the-art armor and also armed with that javelin and a sword.

Not missing a beat, Goliath moves into the pre-fight ranting ritual that could match any seasoned veteran of today’s pay-per-view fights. He taunts Israel, “Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man that we may fight together!”

*(Yet, reader beware, this is also a foreshadowing better than any Hollywood movie for Goliath asks for a man and Israel sends a boy.)*

For now, though Goliath's pre-fight hype is working for "When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid." (v. 11)

The king who was to be Israel's deliverer and his whole army are now immobilized by fear.

Hearing of David's inquiry about the ensuing donnybrook, Saul sends for the shepherd boy.

Upon entering the king's presence it is evident that David is not in awe of the king, in fact David speaks first and he does so to console the king, urging him to 'not lose heart because of the arrogant Philistine.'

David refers to himself as a servant of the king then volunteers to go and "fight with this Philistine." (v. 32)

He gives the first of his two great speeches in this chapter – both of which it's important to note form the theological heart of this story –

In this first speech, David reveals his rhetorical skill & the faith foundation on which his actions rest.

David's speech counters the prevailing ideology of the moment that one needs military might & experience for courage.

David grounds courage in practical & spiritual sources.

He puts forth his curriculum vitae, the bullet points of which might read:

- Life as a shepherd – ordinary though still with a bit of danger.
- Experience with tackling bigger animals like lions and bears (oh my...☺).
- Accustom to pursuing, rescuing, seizing, striking down, and killing said predators. *(It's important to note the verbs used here are similar to those used to describe the action scene between David and the Philistine.)*

David then vows to do to the one who "defied the armies of the living God" (v. 36) the same as he has done to these shepherd's marauding beasts.

David explains to Saul why he should be hired to for the job of standing up to this Philistine & then he gives the credit to God (v. 37).

In that final statement, David is the first to offer the name of Israel's God in this account.

Saul sends him out, echoing this boy's faith – convinced he is the one to go – and pronounces the LORD's name, though not as the source of his strength and rather as the One who goes with David.

We can surmise this is where Saul is coming from, because while he sends David out with the blessing, "Go, and may the LORD be with you!" Saul cannot resist putting faith also in military might and he outfits David with his armor – seeking to outdo Goliath on Goliath's terms.

It's all in vain, for when David tries to move, he says, "I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them."

Of note thus far in the story is the following:

Goliath – a braggart – trusts in arms.

Saul – a kingly coward – trusts in arms.

The boy David – a faithful follower – trusts that God can make a difference & a deliverance possible against the odds. He recognizes there is hope even in the face of apparently hopeless situations.

And so, David goes forth with the gifts he's come to trust – the gifts he's honed over the year's as a shepherd: a staff, a sling, his shepherd's bag and five smooth stones.

As David approaches, Goliath scoffs. He picks up his rhetorical rant, "Am I a dog that you come at me with sticks?" Goliath curses David by invoking the names of his gods. "Come to me," he says to David, "and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field." Goliath is quick to come across as a boastful, arrogant, and self-assured warrior.

David approaches in what is best described as "calm confidence" and offers his second remarkable speech.

He opens by pointing out the obvious naming Goliath's confidence in armed might.

David, on the other hand, only comes in the name of the LORD.

David names the LORD as the power to deliver – for both sides to hear – for both Philistine & Israelite need to know that deliverance is not through trust in human might. Rather, God delivers in spite of "sword & spear" so that all will see the source of true power & the relationship between God and God's faithful people. Both sides need to hear "the LORD saves!"

In this second monologue, David calls Israel "away from its imitation of the nations & calls the nations away from their foolish defiance of the LORD (YHWH)."

David enters the battle with courage and hope because his trust is in the surprising possibilities of God's deliverance.

When the combat finally arrives, the narrative moves swiftly with action verbs tumbling over one another...

David *runs*

*puts* hand in satchel

*takes* a stone

*slings* it

*strikes* the Philistine

stone *sinks*

Philistine *falls*...

And the Philistine army flees, I'm guessing, like a mound of ants when you drop a pebble in their midst.

And with that we see once again how God takes that which is impossible and makes it possible. In this instance, God takes a child – the shepherd boy David – and elevates him to the teaching pinnacle of the story.

Everyone – from Goliath to Saul to the Israelite army – called for a man to come and fight – and the one who rises up – the one who leads – the one who works out God's plan in their midst – is a child...

Now, you're all smart people, I'm guessing you can tell where I'm going with this by now...

I hear an echo in this story of those New Testament youth who stood up to some pretty colossal goliath's of their day.

I think of a 14 year old girl named Mary who conceives a child out of wedlock and bears the brunt of ostracizing side-ways glances and long talks behind her back. And her response to it all, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." (Luke 1:38) And, if you recall the story, this young girl brought God into the world – in the flesh – in the child Jesus.

Now, think about that for a minute? God came into the world as a little child – a defenseless baby. The God of the cosmos took on human skin. The artist entered the painting – as a child. "The word became flesh and lived among us." (John 1:14)

And that baby grew to be the child who sat in the temple, among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. "And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." (Luke 2:46-47)

That child grew to be a man who taught his disciples a new way of thinking and being in the world – opening their eyes to new ways of living – and one day gave them a life-lesson when he instructed his disciples to not turn the people away who were bringing their children to him with these words, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." (Luke 18:15-17)

God is all about delivering surprising possibilities through unexpected means and people – people like David or Mary or Jesus – people who choose to respond with courage and hope in the face of seemingly hopeless situations.

Youth are not just the tomorrow of Christ's church...they are the here and now – youth have a prophetic word of hope we need to hear – youth have a way of leading us into possibilities we might never have dreamed possible unless we take the time to listen to them.

Last Sunday we heard from two of these youth in the Mexico Mission Team Report. Every year all of our mission teams witness to youth who are here and now faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

I and the other adult leaders of the high school workcamp had the privilege to watch about twenty plus youth live out their faith in the present moment in Cuyahoga Falls, OH.

In the words of Bruno Mars' "Uptown Funk" ~ 'don't believe me...just watch'

Which is why I'm going to end my time here and turn it over to:

Blake Pierson (9:00)

Sydney Tomassini (10:30)

...who is going to tell us about how he/she lived out his/her faith in Cuyahoga Falls, OH.

And after Blake / Sydney is finished we will watch a power point of the week which was prepared by Michaela Cushing-Daniels and is set to the song 'Architecture' by Jonathan Thulin.

**Let us pray:**

Almighty God, we ask for the courage to follow your lead, that we might become the people you need us to be...people who come to understand that faithful and truthful speech are part of our calling, and that calling allows affords us the courage to stand up to the colossal challenges before us, which leads to a trust that by Your grace, O God a well-placed stone might prove superior to the armor of a Goliath or a Saul.