

Pentecost 3B

1 Samuel 17:1a, 4-11, 32-49

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**David and Goliath**

*Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; <sup>4</sup>And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. <sup>5</sup>He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. <sup>6</sup>He had greaves of bronze on his legs and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. <sup>7</sup>The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron; and his shield-bearer went before him. <sup>8</sup>He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. <sup>9</sup>If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." <sup>10</sup>And the Philistine said, "Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man, that we may fight together." <sup>11</sup>When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.*

*<sup>19</sup>Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. <sup>20</sup>David rose early in the morning, left the sheep with a keeper, took the provisions, and went as Jesse had commanded him. He came to the encampment as the army was going forth to the battle line, shouting the war cry. <sup>21</sup>Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. <sup>22</sup>David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage, ran to the ranks, and went and greeted his brothers. <sup>23</sup>As he talked with them, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines, and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him.*

*<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 armor; 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 armor, 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 despised 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 toward 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. (1 Samuel 17:32-49)*

We have learned a good deal from owning a dog. For example: we have learned that the rules in Dog World are not the rules of people world. Never mind how differently dogs might greet each other compared to people. But take for example the fact that small dogs have no concept of their size and are unaware of the folly of engaging a dog that outweighs them by 50 pounds with teeth big enough to take more than a pound of flesh. Upon meeting a larger dog, some little dogs will kick up a huge fuss, barking and growling and straining at their leash...frankly, they look a little unbalanced as they bare their teeth dancing on their hind legs. They don't look all that tough when at their full height they still only hit our dog about mid-chest.

Little dog against big dog just begs comparisons to David and Goliath. The little guy says with bravado: Okay tough guy, bring it...show me what you got. And in truth, that is what we take most often from this story. That David, by his own courage and will, is able to defeat Goliath. But to limit David and Goliath to a story of might and courage in spite of size really misses the point.

Last week we learned that Samuel had been sent by the Lord to the future king of Israel. Samuel was ready to anoint each of 7 handsome, strapping sons of Jesse that stood before him. But it was David that God chose; David, the youngest who still spent his days in the dirty, tedious and sometimes dangerous work of tending the family's flocks. In a world where privilege always went to the first born, the Lord chose the last to be king. So David is anointed and for now that seems to be that.

Then, before the encounter between David and Goliath, Scripture tells us that the spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul and that an evil spirit tormented him. What Saul's suffering looked like is not shared with us but it seems to be a disease of mind and spirit. Saul's servants suggest that he call for David who is not only skillful in playing the lyre, but a man of valor, a warrior, prudent of speech and...the Lord is with him. Saul sent for David and David's playing eased Saul's spirit so Saul loved him greatly.

Then abruptly we find ourselves on the battlefield with the Israelites massed on one side of the valley and the Philistines on the other. This is a battle that need not have taken place. I will leave it to you to read 1 Samuel chapter 14 if you want the details. But suffice it to say that the rash foolishness of Saul and his son set the conflict in motion. Now these two armies have been

staring at each other across the valley for 40 days. And on each of those days, Goliath, this great lumbering behemoth of a man, has issued his threat. Send your best and the army of the winner will become master of the other.

It was not uncommon in those days for battles to be settled by one soldier from each side squaring off...winner take all. But who could stand against this man. The estimates of his height range from a mere 6'9" to 12' tall. It's a good bet he was over 9 feet tall. Clearly only a warrior of great might and intestinal fortitude or a fool would face him. Even Saul, the king, is cowering behind the lines with his army.

David is not fighting in this battle. He shows up at the battlefield because he is bringing provisions for his brothers and a gift for their commander from his father Jesse. When he arrives he hears Goliath issue his threat. Then David learns that whoever stands against Goliath will be rewarded with freedom, riches and the hand of the king's daughter. So David steps forward and says, "I'll fight."

Then a couple of interesting things happen. First...when he comes before the king, David speaks first. This is highly irregular...the king always speaks first. But David does so without suffering any consequence. Perhaps Saul is simply relieved that someone is taking the challenge or perhaps Saul is so troubled in heart and mind that he forgets decorum. David speaks first, the king's privilege. Perhaps this is a first signal of the coming change in leadership. Whatever the case may be: Saul tries to dissuade him. But David argues well so Saul agrees and loans him his personal armor. This is quite an honor, to wear the king's own armor into battle. But Saul does something really puzzling here: he puts the armor on in the wrong order. He put the helmet on before the coat of mail. In all of antiquity, in all of history, records show that the helmet is always the last thing to go on. No one knows why Saul did this but perhaps it is further evidence of his confusion and his decline.

Once the armor is on, David says that he cannot walk in it, because he is not used to it. Is it too long? Too heavy? Or is David just unaccustomed to doing battle in such cumbersome attire: he has fought lions and bears clad only in his flimsy shepherds garb...perhaps he is just more comfortable and sure of himself in his own clothes. Whatever his reason, he rejects the armor and goes into battle *his own way*.

When David meets Goliath they do a little verbal sparring and we learn what David's *way* really is: David does not claim the right to come before Goliath based on might or skill. Goliath comes with spear and javelin but David comes in the name of the Lord. David trusts entirely in the power and presence of the Lord to deliver him. "The battle is the Lord's." says David. And David prevails.

David's way signals a profound change in leadership from Saul's way. Saul ruled with force, deceit and wile, clad in armor. David will rule in the name of the Lord, clad in shepherd's rags. We will learn in the coming weeks that David is not beyond reproach. David will mess up time and again and he will mess up spectacularly. But, David will never waiver in his faith and trust in the Lord.

If the story of David and Goliath is not one about persevering in spite of the apparent odds against us: what can we take away from David this day? Many things I think but there are two that stand out for me. The first is something that we have talked about in being a Centered Life church.

When I was preparing to be ordained, I had to try on stoles and vestments to see what fit and what had to be made for me. There is a white chasuble...a cape-like mantel that is worn on festival Sundays by whomever is presiding at communion. Pastor Wayne has worn it many times. When I tried it on it was huge...there was no way that I could wear it and expect to manage bread and wine, much less walk in it. That chasuble became kind of a symbol for me.

We are not called to shoulder the mantle of leadership, authority or any other role that belongs to someone else. We have to find our own way, based on our own gifts and talents. While we can learn from those around us, in the end you have to be who God created you to be. So for example, I cannot be Pastor Wayne. He is a man with many years of experience under his belt. He is vastly talented and clearly called. He can wear that mantle. I cannot. So I have to find my own way. As a woman newer to ministry with different experience, I have been given different gifts with which to serve God and God's people. I cannot be Pastor Wayne. And Pastor Wayne cannot be me. My vestments don't fit him any better than his fit me.

Now lest you think I am comparing Pastor Wayne to Saul...please be assured that is not the case! There is no evil spirit troubling Pastor Wayne and clearly the Lord is with him. And I make no claim to be like David. But it is important that each of us recognize in our own lives where we might be trying to wear the wrong armor...armor that is ill-fitting, too heavy and difficult to walk in. Or perhaps we ought not be wearing armor at all but shepherd's garb instead. Whether as a parent, student or employee; what we learn from David is that we are each uniquely gifted to serve the Lord and we have to find our that way.

The second thing we can learn from David is the Lord is with us and the Lord alone is the source of true strength and victory. That does not mean that we will necessarily prevail against all Goliaths in our lives. We will prevail against some. But what matters is that *we are the Lord's* and if we live and act and use our gifts *in the name of the Lord*, outcomes will be changed. Even if we are seemingly defeated in this life by illness, unemployment, irreconcilable relationships...on the battlefield or in the storm-tossed sea. We are not in the end defeated because the ultimate victory is the Lord's. Amen.