

“Not Your typical David & Goliath Story”

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A David and Goliath story. In our modern context this means “an *improbable* victory” or “underdog” story. Stories like Canada going up against the United States in a trade war, or the USA going up against China. Imagine the Orioles this year beating the Red Sox for the American League pennant. Two guys decide they want to be in the ice cream business so they took a correspondence course on how to make ice cream and set up an ice cream parlour in Burlington VT. Their names were Ben & Jerry. Underdogs all. David and Goliath stories. The thing is: the story of David and Goliath in the Bible is NOT a David and Goliath story (at least as we typically understand it).

Certainly, Goliath didn’t think so because he figured he was unbeatable. Standing 6 feet 9 inches tall he was a giant indeed—even by today’s standards! He was also a highly experienced warrior with superior weaponry. This was still the Bronze Age as we hear time and again in this story in the description of the armour—bronze. But the story makes the point that the tip of Goliath’s spear was made of iron. Now the Israelites didn’t have iron weapons at that time. Goliath called out the Israelites to end the conflict through single combat. The Israelite army didn’t think it was a David and Goliath story either. Four chapters earlier we read that the Israelite army was little more than a militia and it was poorly equipped. They found the sight of Goliath terrifying. Facing Goliath in hand-to-hand combat looked like certain death for the Israelite fighter...and not only that, that soldier’s death would mean the defeat of the whole Israelite army. No one volunteered because no one believed that victory was even “improbable.” Rather, defeat was inevitable. Finally King Saul didn’t see this as a David and Goliath story either. David volunteered to take on Goliath and Saul essentially said, “you got to be kidding. You aren’t a man—you are a boy. You aren’t a warrior—you tend sheep!” But in the end Saul let David represent the Israelite army, mostly because of David’s confidence. Besides, he had no other volunteers.

Most crucially, David didn’t see this as a David and Goliath story. He didn’t see himself as an underdog. Fighting Goliath, in his mind, would not lead to an “improbable” victory.

David volunteered to be the Israelite champion, motivated by two points of confidence. First, he had confidence in his personal abilities. He told Saul, “I have killed lions and bears in my job of protecting our sheep. Killing Goliath will be no different.” Second, he was confident that God would ensure the Israelites were victorious. In the entirety of this story David is the only person who invoked the name of God and God’s care for Israel. He said, “who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?”...that is, our God. Before Saul he said, “The Lord, who saved me from lions and bears, will save me from this Philistine.” Goliath called for a champion to fight and had been doing so every day for 40 days....and in 40 days David was the only volunteer. So Saul said, “OK.”

David’s assurance that he would win is heard in his pre-fight conversation with Goliath. He said, “the Lord God will deliver you into my hand.” Again, hear David’s confidence that God would help him. He said, “I will strike you down and cut off your head.” Again, hear David’s confidence in his ability using a sling. To understand David’s attitude here you have to appreciate that his sling was no toy...no child’s slingshot that we might see today. Slings were a very common and a very serious weapon of war in those days. In the Book of Judges you can read about the Israelites fielding an army that included 700 men armed with slings. A sling could be up to one meter long. Archeologists have found sling stones, which were the size of a billiard ball. There are ancient pictures showing birds in flight being taken out of the air by sling stones. Modern experiments have shown

that the sling stone missile can leave the sling at 100 kph and have the stopping power of a .45 handgun. You can just imagine a shepherd boy whiling away the boring time of sheep tending by practicing. David was not an underdog. This was not an unlikely victory. This was not a David and Goliath story.

Today's popular useage of the idea of the "David and Goliath story" actually turns the story into something that was never the point of the story. The story has been twisted by the reality that "the little guy" can face their giant, whatever that giant is, feeling like the underdog and holding little hope of success. Like one's fight against cancer. Dealing with prejudice daily. Getting ahead financially. These are the David and Goliath stories of our society. But we see real David's all the time and maybe not appreciate it. An upstart mobile phone company seeking success while facing the likes of Telus, Rogers and Bell. Croatia facing England in the World Cup for Football. Take, for example, the current crisis south of the border where migrants who showed up at the border illegally have been separated from their children and now the courts have mandated the reunification of these families. The "giant" these parents face is the U.S. Government, bureaucracy, poor records, language issues, great distances and (at times) time limits. This seems like a "David and Goliath story", but it's not either. There are innumerable average Americans reaching out to help as they can, **believing** they can help. A mother needs to get from Arizona to New York where her daughter is placed and a family driving there on their vacation took the mother along. Some parents need to post bail to gain the freedom to find their children and a third year university student crowd-sourced the needed money over the internet. Lawyers are donating their time to represent families. A non-profit organization has a hot line phone number that people can call to propose how they can help and the organization links the helper with a migrant with that need. A church in San Juan Texas has turned itself into a supply depot for migrant families, receiving and distributing food, diapers, even ice cream bars. What's happening here? Innumerable volunteers do not believe this crisis is a "David and Goliath" story. Like David in our story, they believe they have something to offer. It may not be much but in their small way they are making a small difference...and when an army of David's like this show up, each with their unique contribution, they can make a big, big difference.

Let's take another example—one that is a lot closer to home. A lot of Canadian congregations have bought into society's version of the "David and Goliath" story. They desire a vital future but feel daunted by the growing juggernaut of secular society. And the false remembrance of the David and Goliath story can make this giant look bigger than he really is...make us see ourselves as more helpless than we really are. Consequently the Canadian church can be like the entire Israelite army of our story, looking at one large soldier, and not be willing to step up in response.

But what if...what if the Canadian church were to look at our situation in the same way Daniel actually did in his situation looking at his giant: Goliath? Daniel looked at Goliath and said to himself, "Goliath's game is hand-to-hand combat. I'm not going to play that game. I have a capability with a sling. I'm confident in that." After months of reflection the Session in June agreed that our game needs to be going into the neighbourhood, living out "love your neighbour", demonstrating beyond these walls what Christianity looks like in a society that has forgotten what Christianity looks like. The core of our DNA is care. VAPC has always lived out that nature caring for those of our faith community and also caring for people beyond our faith community. This is something we do, we know we can do and we are pretty confident at it. Hopefully as we do this in our little corner of Canada here some people here will see Christianity in a new way...appreciate what we stand for as a congregation, and then (perhaps for some) come to desire to join us on the journey we are embarked on. It may not be the game our giant plays, but we are pretty confident in the game we play. Our story can be a David story.

The other way David looked at his giant was through his faith and his belief that God desired to help him. He talked about it time and again in our story. It seems to me that a lot of Canadian congregations have forgotten this. Many congregants look at their church's decline and seem to have assumed that God (like Elvis) has left

the building. But when we stop and think about that, is that what we honestly believe? I don't think so. God is still on God's mission in the world—that hasn't changed. The context of that mission in Canada has changed, for sure, with the growing secularization of our society. But God still wants the same thing. The Jews call it "tikkum olam" ("repair the world"): bring the world to acknowledge the one true God and help people living justly one with another. God wishes to repair the world and we are called to partner with God in doing that. And if in doing that our partner is GOD (!) then we have some pretty high-powered help.

So our story is not a David and Goliath story...at least not the way our society understands it. Our story is a David story...if we wish to claim it for ourselves. And if we do, the giants we face may look less intimidating. That was, after all, Goliath's biggest weapon, wasn't it? intimidation. But what if we, like David, choose to see the giant differently?

As the story concludes, Saul asked one of his advisors: "who is that kid?" Next week we will find out.