



St. George Vancouver June 21, 2015

1 Samuel 17: 32-49

David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." 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." 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, 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. 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." 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!" Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. 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. 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. The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. 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." 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. 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, 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."

When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. 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.

Over thirty years ago, some teenagers found a quotation in a magazine and painted it on the side of Pete Seeger's barn. The four-foot high letters said this, "I am done with big things and great things, great institutions and big success; and I am for those tiny, invisible, molecular forces that creep from individual to individual like so many rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, yet which, if you give them time, will rend the hardest monument of (human) pride."

The story of David and Goliath, the first reading we heard this morning, is all about this very thing, for it's the story of the triumph of something small and seemingly defenseless over all that is big, all that is great, and all that is proud.

And so let's go to this story, the story of the triumph of the young shepherd boy named David over the proud Philistine named Goliath. Let's get to this story for at the heart of it is a durable and radiant truth that is not only central to how we understand the God of David but is at the heart of what we see in the person of Jesus as well. And, of course, it's an understanding that will be particularly important to us today in that we are confirming and reaffirming people in their Christian faith as well as remembering all Aboriginal peoples in Canada this day.

In our story, the boy David has already been anointed king by Samuel but has not yet been recognized by anyone else as king. The Philistines and the Israelites are in a combat stand-off and so the Philistines decide to send out one representative warrior to challenge one Israelite to fight, with the outcome of this one-on-one conflict deciding the outcome of the battle. The Philistines send out the largest and most fearsome warrior they have—a tall, proud man named Goliath. He comes forth heavily armed and shouts a challenge to the Israelites. They are terrified and do not know what to do. Just as this is happening, David happens into the encampment and hears Goliath's challenge as he taunts the Israelites a second time. David offers himself as the representative that will go up against Goliath.

Saul cannot believe David would do such a thing in that he is small and has no armor or real weapons. To this David replies that as a shepherd he has had to kill many wild animals to defend his sheep and that time and again God has preserved his life. Based on God's protecting power, then, David is willing to go up against Goliath.

The rest of the story we know very well. After rejecting all the armor that Saul puts on David, David simply uses the one weapon he has from his life as a shepherd. He bends down and picks up five smooth stones. He places one of the stones in his sling and hurls it in Goliath's direction. The stone strikes Goliath in the head, and the huge proud man in all his armor falls face down upon the earth defeated.

And so one of the messages in this story is clear; the God of David, the same God we know in the person of Jesus, does not reveal his power through one who is tall and proud and seemingly invulnerable. No, the God of David, the God we know in the person of Jesus, loves to dwell with those whom the world regards as small and vulnerable, with those the world might not even notice. These are the people that our God seems to have the most kinship with and the most heart for. And these are the people through whom our God seems to be most pleased to work.

But our story has another message as well—that God not only stands with those the world would regard as small and vulnerable but the energy and movement of God is toward the casting down of the mighty from their thrones and the lifting up of the small and the vulnerable. God's liberating

and dignifying energy and movement wants to assist us in standing up to the many Goliaths that the world will serve up to us in our lives.

And so on this day in which our country celebrates all of its Indigenous peoples, we must ask ourselves this: can we, will we, honour them as those among us who have been the most vulnerable and disregarded of peoples and, therefore, the ones with whom God stands? And to build on this, can we, will we, embrace and participate in the continuing truth and reconciliation effort as the holy process by which the Goliath of colonialism will be brought down at last?

And on this day in which eight people will affirm their faith as Christians and in which we will all remember our baptismal identity and purpose, we must ask ourselves this: can they and we, will they and we, cleave to our own smallness, hold fast to our own humility and vulnerability as a gift that we offer to one another and to the world? And to build on this, can they and we, will they and we, offer ourselves as David did, confident in the power of God, to be the vehicle through which God will continue to cast down the mighty and to lift up the lowly?

And finally on this day in which we're all still reeling from the news of the Goliath of racism in Charleston, SC, we ask ourselves this: can we, will we, open ourselves to receiving this situation with vulnerable hearts instead of hearts made hard by so much news of violence in the world? And to build on this, can we, will we, rededicate ourselves to the small and powerful everyday actions that, with God's help, have the power to fell the Goliath of racism like so many smooth stones?

In all these situations, the one thing that might hold us back from the call to action that our story has within it is the belief that being small and vulnerable is the same as having no power. What the story of David and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus teaches us is that being small and human and vulnerable is the way of being that enables the power of God to be present and active with us and through us. And this is true whether we seem to prevail in a given situation or not. All we need to remember to do is to act.

African American Peter Gomes, the former chaplain at Harvard said it this way: "The gospel of Jesus Christ comes down to a rather simple proposition for ordinary (small) people like you and like me: If God is to be known, that knowledge will be in the lives of the ordinary people who are redeemed by his extraordinary message of love. What the world knows of God it will know through us; for better or for worse we are the good news, the gospel; we are the light of the world... We do not have to postpone the blessedness of Christ into some ever- retreating future, and we dare not wait for more qualified Christians, better prayers, or better rules to come along and do our shining for us. No, the work of God awaits our hands, the love of God awaits our hearts, and the people of God await our fellowship here and now, ordinary and imperfect though we may be."