



Broad Street Presbyterian Church

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“David and Goliath”

1 Samuel 17:1a, 4-11, 19-23, 32-49

June 24, 2018

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David and Goliath is one of Christianity’s favorite stories. It’s so quintessentially ... American. Little guy makes good. Right triumphs over might. Rocky Balboa fights Apollo Creed. Harry Potter faces Voldemort. Cheryl Strayed hikes the Pacific Crest Trail.

Underdog overcomes big dog. Faith beats fear. The boy David will go on to become Israel’s greatest king: a brilliant politician and military strategist. He’s compelling and attractive. Biblical writers love him. David and Goliath calls us to be brave when the odds are against us, when we face something big and scary.

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann suggests that Goliath symbolizes everything that is fierce and intimidating. Everything that immobilizes us; which includes our worst fears—fear of failure or risk, or intimacy or loneliness; fear of the future.¹

Then Brueggemann pivots, and challenges us. He says if we read the Bible only for personal enrichment and reassurance, we won’t hear the whole story, because we screen out the violence.

The Bible has long known about the seething brutality mostly right beneath the surface of public life....We are always close to blood – a violence we can neither justify or deny and which we mostly leave unacknowledged.²

Brutality, right beneath public life, unacknowledged. Think road rage. Think capital punishment, think school shootings.

In Parkland, Florida, in February, on Valentine’s Day, a student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shot and killed 17 students and staff. Last Sunday, students from that high school began a 50-stop bus tour across more than 20 states. They call the tour “Road to Change.” Their goal is to register young voters who can then cast ballots. These teens refuse to accept gun violence as an unsolvable issue. They are stepping up to Goliath, where adults keep backing down.

Like David, they practice. When David strikes down Goliath, he doesn’t do it with one lucky slingshot. He has practiced for years, protecting the flock against lions and bears. His success results from muscle memory, from lots of practice.

¹ *David and Goliath*, sermon preached by Rev. John M. Buchanan, June 21, 2009.

² <http://www.ekklesiaproject.org/blog/2012/06/preaching-the-terrors-and-wonders/>

Students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School practice. They know Goliath is big and strong, and well funded. They have learned to navigate taunts and trash talk. They practice confrontation and truthful speech. They trust that a well-placed stone or word can penetrate armor.

This week, U.S. immigration policies have dominated the news. Children separated from parents have wrenched our collective hearts and focused our collective resolve. Here at Broad Street, young adults from our city help us see this Goliath, through an art exhibit called *Dreamers of Columbus*. It features local recipients of DACA, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. The program protects undocumented immigrant youth who were brought here as children. It guards them from deportation and grants them work permits.

DACA continues now only because of court injunctions. Only those who have been recipients in the past can re-apply, which means a new generation of high school students doesn't have paperwork needed to attend college or work, or be shielded from deportation.

In the exhibit, they talk about their lives. They face Goliath. A young man named Elvis testifies,

It's almost like the original sin. You know, even though I was a kid and I didn't make a conscious choice to come here – it's like from that moment on you've been tainted and no matter what you do you're not good enough.³

According to the Pew Research Center, 74% of Americans favor granting legal status to immigrants brought to the US illegally as children.⁴ Yet our Congress has not been able to come to consensus about DACA. Congress seems out of practice in doing their job of legislating. So children and families wait. Each Dreamer has to fight for what we take for granted—a driver's license, work eligibility, attending college, not being deported. They have grown up in our country but our rules of citizenship don't include them.

Visit the exhibit. Take in the stories. See the written words as smooth stones borne of the courage of the young. As time permits, come at 11:00 today to Palmer Hall for a social justice conversation led by a Broadstreeter doing something creative for DACA.

In our lifetimes, many of us saw the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of the system of apartheid in South Africa in 1994. We have seen well-placed stones of opposition bring down armored giants.

In 2010, the Rev. Samuel Wells preached on the story of David and Goliath at the Baccalaureate at Duke University, where he was Dean of the Chapel. He writes:

You can bet that 99 percent of people who read this story identify with David. We all think we're the little guy... But ... Why is a Duke degree so coveted? *Because it gives you a chance to be Goliath.* It gives you the armor ... the weaponry ... the respect ... All the things Goliath had. *All the things David didn't have...*

Wells goes on to note that while we admire David for refusing Saul's armor, we load up our cars, our homes and our country to look like Goliath, with so many safety and security features we can hardly move around in them.

³ Elvis in the *Dreamers of Columbus* exhibit, hosted by the Eastside Arts Initiative at Broad Street Presbyterian Church, June 14-August 17, 2018.

⁴ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/19/public-backs-legal-status-for-immigrants-brought-to-u-s-illegally-as-children-but-not-a-bigger-border-wall/>

Wells then transitions into what happens next in the story.

David becomes king. But it doesn't stop there. Gradually a terrible irony begins to take shape. *David becomes Goliath*. David becomes a bully ... a merciless military powerbroker ... a ruthless acquisitor of pleasure and advantage. David becomes the overblown beached whale he began his career by destroying... *David becomes Goliath*.⁵

Wells looks at the students, about to receive cap and gown and Duke diploma, and declares them at risk. In the next 10 or 20 years, will they slowly turn into Goliath? Are we also at risk? In the last 5 or 10 years, have we been turning into Goliath? How do we avoid losing our souls?

What about our country? Are we turning into bullies who taunt and trash talk other nations and peoples? How do we citizens remain true to ourselves and our deepest values?

David's ability to defeat Goliath doesn't happen just because he is young or has alternative tools. This is more than a story about strategy. This story is about God.

Practice shapes David's arm. God shapes his imagination. In those hours tending sheep, gazing into the Mediterranean sky. In solitude and prayer and worship. David and God have spent many a night together, under the stars, protecting a flock against bears and lions. Author Eugene Peterson calls David's imagination God-saturated.⁶

By contrast, the Israelite and Philistine armies have virtually no imagination, and neither do their leaders. They can't imagine anything except enslaving one another. The teens from Parkland, Florida, and the students in DACA have imagination and purpose.

David knows Goliath is not God, but, over time, he loses sight of this. So many of us do, for a season. Even in his worst moments, as warlord and as sexual predator, later as grieving father and dying king, his God-saturated imagination helps him accept newness. Even when he is furthest from God, David turns to God. He knows he belongs to God.

We don't have to become Goliath as David did. Our country doesn't have to act like Goliath. We can choose to respond to situations with lives shaped by the language of faith and its practice, sometimes standing alone as David does, and sometimes linking arms with others, marching. We can choose to live a God-filled life, to allow our faith to guide us in courage and witness. Because we belong to God. We all belong to God. Amen.

⁵ <https://www.faithandleadership.com/five-smooth-stones> (Adapted to present tense).

⁶ Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall: Reflections on the Life of David* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998), chapter 4.