

Sermon

“Chalk One Up for the Little Guy!”

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, June 20, 2021

4th Sunday after Pentecost

Prayer for Illumination:

We sing, “God of grace and God of glory - on thy people pour thy power....grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour!”

- † This hour when the machinations of the empires of the world leave us in vertigo — wondering where the next violent hot-spot will flash into flame...**
- † This hour as we watch the world timidly re-emerge from COVID lock-down and we worry about when the next global pandemic will hit...**
- † This hour of worship where our settled assumptions about power, and pride, and privilege can be broken and fall away uncomfortably.**

Lord God, you are the champion of the little people:

- † of the weak**
- † of the foolish**
- † of children before giants**

So send your Spirit to us this day as we wrestle with your Word, and illumine us with an alternative to the deathly ways of our world gone amok. In the name of the Word-become-flesh, Christ the Lord. Amen.

1 Sam. 17:1 Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. 2 Saul and the Israelites gathered and encamped in the valley of Elah, and formed ranks against the Philistines. 3 The Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them. 4 And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. 5 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. 6 He had greaves of bronze on his legs and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. 7 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. 8 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. 9 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." 10 And the Philistine said, "Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man, that we may fight together." 11 When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

1 Sam. 17:12 Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons. In the days of Saul the man was already old and advanced in years. 13 The three eldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle; the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah.

14 David was the youngest; the three eldest followed Saul, 15 but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem. 16 For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening.

1Sam. 17:17 Jesse said to his son David, "Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers; 18 also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See how your brothers fare, and bring some token from them."

1Sam. 17:19 Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. 20 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. 21 Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. 22 David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage, ran to the ranks, and went and greeted his brothers. 23 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.

1Sam. 17:24 All the Israelites, when they saw the man, fled from him and were very much afraid. 25 The Israelites said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. The king will greatly enrich the man who kills him, and will give him his daughter and make his family free in Israel." 26 David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he

should defy the armies of the living God?” 27 The people answered him in the same way, “So shall it be done for the man who kills him.”

1Sam. 17:28 His eldest brother Eliab heard him talking to the men; and Eliab’s anger was kindled against David. He said, “Why have you come down? With whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart; for you have come down just to see the battle.” 29 David said, “What have I done now? It was only a question.” 30 He turned away from him toward another and spoke in the same way; and the people answered him again as before.

1Sam. 17:31 When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul; and he sent for him. 32 David said to Saul, “Let no one’s heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.” 33 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.” 34 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, 35 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. 36 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.” 37 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!”

1Sam. 17:38 Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with

a coat of mail. 39 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. 40 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.

1Sam. 17:41 The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. 42 When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. 43 The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. 44 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." 45 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. 46 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, 47 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."

1Sam. 17:48 When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. 49 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.

I. Goliath

- A. Not a story-book “giant.” In all likelihood he stood about 6 ft. 9. Big and healthy . . . A special forces guy for sure . . . *But nothing super-human.***
- B. He is well-armed, and well-protected (all the latest military weapons and armor)**
- C. Represents all that stands in the way**
 - * And humiliates**
 - * leads to despair and failure to act.**
- D. Saul’s and Israel’s *anxiety makes him into more than he actually is!***
 - * A fierce and dangerous foe - YES!**
 - * An insurmountable obstacle - Not by a long-shot!**
- E. Saul is a failure as king *not* because he fails to manage the kingdom to achievable ends! He is capable of doing that. In fact he is doing that without God’s help as this scene opens.**
- F. He fails as king because he cannot trust a future which is beyond his management and which relies solely on God’s power and presence.**
 - * Has quickly adopted the habit of every empire which is to “fight fire with a bigger fire.”**

- * only he can't get those game-changing improved weapons.**

II. Reminder of Historical Context in 1 Samuel

A. We wanted a king to be like other nations

- 1. Response to violence, barbarism, and chaos of the tribal period (see Joshua and Judges).**
- 2. Response to aspirations of Empire:**
 - * Power**
 - * Control**
 - * Prestige**
 - * Affluence**

B. We get Saul . . . Not much of a king as it turns out

- 1. He was supposed to deal with the Philistines!**
- 2. Proved ineffectual.**
 - * defeat/humiliation**
 - * arms embargo (1 Samuel 13.19-23)**

C. Saul is paralyzed by the seemingly insurmountable task of fighting an enemy who has superior weapons and armor.

D. He needs a game-changer....a secret weapon...

III. Last week - David quietly anointed as king.

- ### **A. By this week (the next page of the story in the Bible) everyone seems to have forgotten that. He is back to being the “little brother.”**
- 1. David is still a tween - not old enough to go out with the army.**

- a. Only there to deliver lunch to his brothers.
- 2. But *he acts like a king* - stepping forward to protect Israel in the face of an external threat.

IV. One of the great stories of the Hebrew Bible.

- A. Little Israel up against the mighty “Sea People.”
 - 1. Phillistines are more numerous
 - 2. Wealthy through conquest and trade
 - 3. Latest weapons and military hardware
 - a. Bronze armor and weapons.
 - b. Iron was low quality at the time - not the steel which would eventually be discovered and which would rapidly overtake bronze in the centuries to follow.
- B. Little David up against Big Goliath!

V. Indeed, while there are *many* lessons we could learn I want to speak to the question of POWER

- A. Who has it?
- B. What will they do with it?
- C. Where is God’s Power deployed?

IV. Goliath represents a certain idea of power

- A. Might makes right
- B. Military dominance is the path to victory

- C. The idea that the strong *should* dominate and control the weak.
 - D. These notions of Power are not hard to find among us:
 - 1. The parent who dominates the family
 - 2. Organized Crime
 - 3. Nation-states who invade their neighbors
- V. This idea of power is prevalent in scripture too.
- A. It's why Israel wanted a King and why God did not want them to have one.
 - 1. *Because Kings advance their agendas by "going out to war."*
 - B. It is behind the behavior of Pharoah in Egypt.
 - C. It is behind Herod's slaughtering of the innocents in Matthew.
 - D. It is behind the anxiety of the Romans which led to the crucifixion of Jesus.
- VI. But there is also a persistent alternative!
- A. From the Isaiah who counseled that "In returning and in rest is your salvation." in the face of foreign invasion,
 - B. To stories of youngest children like Jacob, and Joseph,
 - C. To the Hebrew midwives (Shiphra and Puah)
 - D. To little David
 - E. To Jesus and his refusal to engage in military conquest to establish the Kingdom of God

***** There has been a persistent alternative offered that claimed that personal weakness + the power of God is enough to do all things. *****

VII. David prevails not because *he* is powerful, but because God is powerful and chooses to act through a weakling like David.

A. Now this should be heard by us as good news!

B. Think of the many places where we are weak but God can be strong?

- 1. The parent acknowledging the limits of how much and how long they can control and protect the child-becoming-an-adult.**
- 2. The depressive honestly acknowledging the depth of their pain, while at the same time trusting that God is with them in the darkness too and that recovery does not depend entirely on them.**
- 3. Think of Gandhi in the face of Imperial oppression**
- 4. Think of Oscar Romero in the face of his assassin**
- 5. Think of Martin Luther King in the Birmingham jail**

C. All of these and many others who are nameless have done *great things* by remaining faithful in their weakness and relying on God's redemptive power.

- VIII. To acknowledge the alternative narrative about power which our faith provides is *not* to embrace some Pollyanna outlook which glibly says Jesus makes everything OK.**
- A. But it *is* to call out the lies which persist among us and to question them vigorously.**
 - B. We cannot continue to believe the lie that**
 - 1. if we just had enough conceal and carry permits,**
 - 2. or a big-enough military budget**
 - 3. Or enough gated & guarded communities.... that we will be safe.**
 - C. It is a lie that this could be so and how we persist in believing it in the face of so much evidence that it isn't true is baffling.**
 - D. There will never be enough weapons to accomplish peace.**
 - 1. And even if, one day there *were* enough weapons to silence the voices of those we find irritating — that would *not* be the peace of God — it would only be the kind of “peace” you get at the end of a sword.**
 - E. You may recall that Samuel's mother sings a song of praise to God when she learns that she is pregnant. She sings**

"The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength," Samuel's mother proclaimed (1 Sam. 2:4).

F. Isn't it interesting to note that when Jesus' mother discovers that she is with child she echoes Hannah by singing,

*"[God] has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
[God] has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly" (Luke 1:51b-52).*

I've gone on too long — it is time to wrap this up...

X. We live in a complex world. Both I and biblical witness understand that.

A. But to live a life of faith is to trust in God enough
† **to stop putting all our confidence in worldly notions of "power" and**
† **to begin believing that if we will allow ourselves to be the weaklings we are - that God will be able to use us in extraordinary ways.**