

“David and Goliath”
I Samuel 17 (Select Verses)
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First Presbyterian Church of Willmar, MN
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One of my favorite movies of all time is a movie called “Hook.” It came out in 1991, starring Robin Williams as a grown-up Peter Pan – Attorney Peter Panning - who has left the world of Neverland to join the world of big business and corporate takeovers. He has forgotten who he is, and where he came from. He has become, as his son describes, a pirate, who swoops in and ravishes smaller companies, claiming them as booty. Who would have thought that Peter Pan would grow up to be a pirate? But Neverland is in trouble, and when Peter’s son is kidnapped by Captain Hook, he must find the child within himself once more and rally the lost boys to stand up, in youthful confidence, to Captain Hook, a villain of giant proportions. Shenanigans and hijinks ensue; Peter finds his happy thoughts, so he can fly again; the lost boys rediscover hope; and Peter saves his family.

It’s a classic underdog story. And we love underdog stories! We love seeing the noble, small character triumph against the villainous giant.

That underdog story is a tale as old as time. It goes back all the way to David and Goliath. Samuel Wells points out, “almost all of us know this story of David and Goliath, because it’s in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim scriptures, all three. And its made its way to the heart of our contemporary cultural imagination. Goliath the Philistine is big, beefy, and belligerent. David the shepherd boy from Bethlehem steps out of obscurity, waves aside the clumsy armor offered by Saul, the King of Israel, and taking five smooth stones and a slingshot, leaves Goliath biting the dust.”¹

The little guy wins. And we all love that story.

This is a great story for children. It is a fabulous story to teach in VBS and Sunday School because kids can relate to David – a small person in a great big world. Children understand David because when you are this big, everything around you is giant. And this story can be encouraging and empowering for children because they learn that God is watching out for the little ones, the young ones, the ones who seem powerless in the face of giants. That is good news for kids!

Its good news for us, too. We are surrounded by giants.

Our giants have different names now, but like Goliath, those giants are still arrogant bullies, wielding their might, taking advantage of those less powerful and those without the resources to fight back. What kind of giants have caused you grief this week? Drug companies holding your necessary prescription medications hostage with exorbitant prices? Health insurance companies making you jump through hoops to access coverage? We need what they have to offer. We are thankful to have access to medication and healthcare. But nothing makes you feel powerless like automated phone systems and hours spent on hold trying to get answers.

And how about the images and stories we've heard coming from the Border this week? Whatever your political leanings and opinions are, whatever side of the immigration debate you support, I think we can agree that something is broken. My heart has grieved this week: first, because of the images of crying children (I'm a former child welfare social worker, camp counselor, and preschool teacher – I have a special place in my heart for children - and I'm a mother – crying children break my heart); and then I grieved for the anger and cruelty that adults can hurl at each other in the form of accusations and blame. People are mean to each other in the media and on social networks. Its icky, and toxic. I can't help but wonder if all the anger, all the accusations, all the blaming, is because we all recognize that we are all up against a giant – an immigration system in need of reform – that we don't know how to fix. It just seems like it is a multi-layered problem that is bigger than us. Like Saul's army and the Philistines at a standoff across the valley, all we can do is hurl insults at each other because we don't know how to defeat the giant.

And there are so many other giants – problems that are bigger than us.

But in the end, size isn't what matters. Faith is. David doesn't defeat Goliath because he is cleverer or because he has superior weapons. He doesn't defeat Goliath by attempting to become Goliath. He defeats Goliath by being himself, using the meager, but beautifully God-given gifts he possesses, and by believing the battle is God's. Here's the thing about David. He was a kid facing off against a tank with only a BB gun. What he possessed was immense faith. David was a kid who had spent uncountable hours alone in the wilderness with sheep. And in that wilderness, where he was charged with shepherding and protecting the sheep, he had nobody to rely on but God. He didn't have

powerful weapons. He didn't have a cell phone to call for help. He had God --- and hours and hours of days to meditate, talk to God, wonder at God's creation, experience first-hand God's provision and protection. What David took with him when he entered into battle with Goliath was well-honed and practiced faith. Saul wanted David to become like a warrior, dressed in armor and carrying sharpened weapons – he wanted him to become like Goliath to face Goliath. David knew that God had created him just the way he was and that was enough. That knowledge allowed David to face a giant with a song of praise and gratitude to God in his heart, joy in his step, and absolutely no fear.

I wonder if we can learn something from David about how to face giants. We don't have to become like the giants to defeat the giants. We face them as we are, as God created us to be, and have faith that God will do the rest. What does that mean for us? It means when we face giants, we can choose to face them as God's faithful people:

- We can speak truth to power AND be kind about how we say it.
- We can seek justice AND practice forgiveness for injustice.
- We can strive to uphold the law AND be compassionate and generous to those who are under the law.
- We can disagree with our neighbor AND love our neighbor.

What we bring to the world as people of faith, is the conviction that even when we are facing giants, we have a calling to do so *as* people of faith with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (the Fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 5). And I know this is hard. It is easy to be rude the person we don't know on the other end of the phone line...or to the waitstaff we will probably never see again. It feels really good, in the moment, to demand retribution, or to cuss out that insurance company representative – who is just doing her job. It lets us off the hook to cast blame on someone else. But that is not who we are.

And if it is, we might need to check ourselves. It is altogether possible that we, like Peter Panning, have become the pirate. I know we would all like to think that we are the underdog and God is on our side. But what if we have become the giant? It happened to David. The shepherd boy who defeated a giant with only faith and five stones became a king. He accumulated power, stature, possessions, wives. He became the giant force that pounded his enemies. He grew up to abuse his power and depend on the strength of his horses and chariots instead of depending on God. And when he did, he fell from grace. If

we have become the giant, perhaps we can rediscover a child-like faith. It might begin by praising God, recounting the ways God has already provided for us and protected us. And then we can, by the grace of God, begin to shed the ill-fitting armor of power, status, and possessions. It is my prayer that it would be sufficient for all of us to have the faith of a child and to live with humility and compassion. May we be beloved children in the family of God, not pirates or giants.

ⁱ Wells, Samuel. *Five Smooth Stones*. Duke University Baccalaureate. May 14, 2010.