

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

Psalm 9:9-20

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Mark 4:35-41

The story of David and Goliath that we just heard this morning in our reading from First Samuel is one of the most well-known stories in the Bible...and one of the most beloved. There is a universal sense of triumph in situations where the underdog wins against all odds. Perhaps the reason we all tend to root for the underdog is because at any point in our own lives we've all known what it feels like to *be* the underdog. We want the 'little' guy to win. There's also a part of each one of us that wants to see the triumphant, haughty and powerful one crumble. It seems simply to be a matter of human nature. There's probably a little bit of envy mixed in with all these different emotions, too. And we find out that it's a lot easier to identify with the one who is trying to beat the odds that are against him than to identify with the one with superior strength because we're familiar with the scenario of going against all odds. We all love to yell, "Go for it!!" At the end of the story, we can't help but know that God had a hand in all of it...not just for little David, but for us as well. We can probably all think back to times in our own lives when we were triumphant in a situation in which we know full well that the odds were against us.

If we look at this story in some detail, we can see that God was present not only at the confrontation between David and Goliath. God was present with David long before that confrontation ever took place. God prepared David for just this moment in his life...along with many other such crucial moments. And God prepares us as well in ways we may not be able to identify right away, but we can see them in retrospect.

Think about the circumstances of David's life. How did God prepare him for his confrontation with Goliath? He was the youngest of eight boys in his family and he was the runt of the litter...as they say. If David's older brothers(and there were seven of them!) were anything like the typical older brothers in a typical family, then there was definitely some teasing and

taunting going on that was directed at David. 'Trash talk,' as we say, is very often done good-naturedly, but it can easily slip into verbal aggression designed to shake the recipient and wound his soul. In all likelihood, David grew up with this kind of verbal aggression from the beginning of his life. He was well-prepared and well-protected against all the comments from Goliath prior to their meeting on the battlefield. David knew exactly how to handle 'trash talk' from a bully! This little 'coincidence' in David's family life at the hands of his older brothers may very well have been part of God's plan to prepare David for just such a moment as his confrontation with Goliath. It's easy to lose heart and to lose confidence and to lose control of one's own emotions when someone comes along and assaults us verbally. We can't win the battle when our confidence is gone. It takes a lot of self-control and self-confidence to resist 'taking the bait' or to allow such verbal onslaughts to erode our confidence. David had been preparing for this moment all his life without ever realizing it.

As the youngest and the smallest in his family, David did not get the jobs that required brawn and teamwork. David was sent out to tend the family sheep which is a lonely job. He was out on the slopes by himself twelve to fourteen hours a day. He had lots of time on his hands. There was no one to talk to; no one to share the responsibility with; and no one who could give him a break. Except for the sheep's bleating, it was pretty quiet tending the sheep. Just imagine what *you* might do with the day if you didn't have your I-phone...for the whole day...day after day after day. And what if there was no TV and no computer and no I-Pad and no video games...not even a radio. What would you do with your day? How would you entertain yourself? We know that David played the lyre and he wrote psalms. In the process of writing the psalms, he was creating his own prayer and then setting it to music. David was most definitely aware of God...and listening for God...and talking to God. The thread of that connection grew stronger and stronger each day. God was David's constant companion. David's awareness of God and his attention to God were part of God's preparation of David for greater things...not just the confrontation with Goliath...but the monarchy of Israel as well. The solitude of tending sheep helped create a solid core and a strong sense of self in David. It also taught him how to problem-solve when one of the sheep was in trouble or was sick or wouldn't eat. David was by himself, so he had to figure out what to do in all circumstances. He also had to figure out what

to do about the wild animals...the bears and the lions...that threatened to kill his sheep and him as well. Honing his skill with a slingshot was a matter of survival long before his confrontation with Goliath. God was busy getting David ready to go against all the odds and to do battle with Goliath. Have you ever looked at your own life and been able to see how God had prepared you to triumph against all odds in a crucial situation in your life?

This story about the little guy being triumphant against all odds isn't just about the victory. This little story is about man's participating in the cosmic battle between good and evil. It's the story of each of us being willing to continue to put forth our best efforts in situations that are against all odds. It is an inspirational story about not giving up hope...even when the odds are against us. We look to our own lives in search of God's preparation for us and we may wonder, "What is God preparing us for?" We probably don't know yet, but when the time comes, God will unleash all those skills that we will need in order to participate in God's plan. Whether it is our personal life or our communal life here at St. Paul's, God is ever-present and preparing us to step into God's will for ourselves and for this congregation.

We will spend the next few weeks and perhaps the next few months praying together, speaking together, listening to each other, listening to God and meeting together to discern God's will for St. Paul's. Like most churches, the pandemic has hit us hard. The protocols to keep us safe from disease stripped away every single aspect of our life together and left us to try to stay connected as best we could without the structure we had created to meet those needs. We are not unique in struggling to put our church life and our church family back together again. We are in good company.

As we think about the months ahead of us, let's look at where we've been and see if we can identify how God has been preparing us for just this moment of uncertainty. How has God prepared us for a situation that seems like our survival as a church body is against all odds? We know that God knew what would happen when the pandemic hit. And we have to trust that God continues to watch over us and nurture us and provide for our needs. To move into our future we're going to need to double down on our commitment to God and to each other.

We're going to need to pray frequently; to ask God for guidance and for provision for us; to stir up our imaginations about what is possible and what is not possible; to speak to each other on a regular basis to keep our connections to each other strong and pliable.

God has seen fit to provide us with financial resources, but those will not last forever. Our survival may seem to us to be against all odds, but we mustn't forget the presence of the Holy Spirit within the walls of this sanctuary and the bonds that have been created among us. We must not give up hope for that would be the same as telling God that we don't need God's care and direction. And perhaps it means that we aren't sure that God is truly in charge. And maybe we're even a little uncertain about whether or not we trust God...and whether or not we will be willing to hear God when God speaks to us. Maybe we will hear something from God that we don't want to hear!

We need to cling closely to one another and to extend our special kind of spiritual strength with those in our lives who may not have that resource. Bring them with you to this oasis of God's love. Share your sense of spiritual nourishment with those you know who are struggling to feel loved and cared for and safe and confident...all of which are gifts from God.

We shall pray without ceasing...individually and together...and we will ask God for direction in what we should do in the coming months to carry out God's will...against all odds. Because we are certain about one thing in the midst of so much uncertainty...God's love is profound, boundless, and all around us.

God knows the way God wants St. Paul's to go. And God will make it known to us. We just need to seek God out and then listen carefully...and then gather our smooth stones and our slingshot and set out to slay the giant of the aftermath of the pandemic.

Never abandon hope or give up confidence.

May God be with us.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.