

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

June 24, 2018, The Fifth Sunday After Pentecost/The Twelfth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Mark 4:35-41, I Samuel 17 Selected Verses, the Message Translation

FIVE SMOOTH STONES

You've heard the phrase hundreds, if not thousands, of times: "it was a true David and Goliath story."

And whether they are talking about something in sports, or business, or national or international politics, you know exactly what they mean.

The smaller person, or organization, or team, or nation, went up against a giant of impossible odds, and won in an unexpected way.

It's surprising to think that something that happened in battle around 3,000 years ago, in a small nation, still speaks so powerfully today.

But if we let the story of David and Goliath only be about the little guy winning against a giant of a problem, then we are missing the deeper truths of the story.

The armies of King Saul of Israel were battling the Philistines, whom Israel had battled off and on for hundreds of years, since the time when the Israelites first entered the Promised Land with Joshua.

When the shepherd boy David came to the battlefields to bring food to his brothers he was somewhere in his mid-teens. Many scholars think he was about 15 years old.

What is most important to the story of David and Goliath though isn't David's age. It isn't how tall he was, or how strong, or how creative in battle, what is most important to this story is that David was a follower of God.

When David arrived at the battlefield with the food, he was so interested to see that battle that he left the food he was supposed to deliver to his family with the person in charge of the baggage. Then he ran to see what was happening.

What he saw was that King Saul's army was terrified in the face of one Philistine, a man named Goliath. Daily Goliath taunted the army, asking for just one person who was brave enough to fight him.

The writer of 1 Samuel makes sure we know how overwhelming Goliath was. He was about 10 feet tall, and yes there might be a bit of exaggeration here, but you can rest assured he was really tall!

His helmet was bronze, and using the weight of shekels named in the story his armor weighed about 150 pounds, and the head of his spear weighed about 19 pounds.

Oxford Annotated Bible, p. 364 OT

No wonder no one wanted to go out to fight him, it was guaranteed to be a losing battle.

But when David witnessed Goliath come out for the daily taunting of Israel's army, what affected David wasn't Goliath's size and power. David was amazed that someone would challenge the army of Yahweh, the Living God.

And there it is, the first time in the story that anyone on Israel's side of the battle has even mentioned God. King Saul hasn't mentioned God, those who follow him into battle haven't called on God.

Instead it is this young teenager who reminds them all of what is true, that they are God's people and God is with them in the battle.

Saul and the armies of Saul are disconnected from who they are serving, who is with them in battle. "Israel...acts as if God were irrelevant to the battle..."

"For David it is unthinkable to think about a battle (or anything else), apart from the rule of the Living God." (see p. 128.9)

Based on his trust in God, David tells King Saul that he will be the one who will do battle with Goliath one on one.

He tells Saul and his army how God has protected him as a shepherd when lions or bears attacked his flocks of sheep. "The Lord," David says: "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." (v. 17:37)

So King Saul agreed to let him go into battle, but first Saul wanted to protect David with all the protection he can.

So he dressed David in his own battle armor.

He put his bronze helmet on his head

and his coat of chainmail on David

and then strapped his sword over the armor.

And all these weighed David down so much he couldn't even walk.

So David took them off and grabbed his wooden staff he used to help protect his flocks of sheep,

then bending down in the wadi, or stream bed, he chose 5 smooth stones.

He put them into his shepherd's bag and took out his slingshot.

Then he approached Goliath.

Goliath took one look at his shepherd's staff and sling shot,

and called out, "what am I, a dog that you are coming after with a stick?"

David answered: "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...

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 the Lord will give you into our hand."

...and the rest, as they say is history. With one of those five smooth stones, David killed Goliath

This is so much more than the story of a mighty battle between a little guy and a giant of a man.

This is the story of David trusting the powerful, faithful, living God of Israel.

No matter how tall and strong and mighty Goliath was,

David knew that his God was stronger. (p. 133.6)

See: Interpretation Bible Commentaries: Brueggemann, Walter,
First and Second Samuel, Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990, pp. 127-133

As I spent time with this story this week, I began to think about how we go up against the Goliaths that come into our lives.

And the Goliaths will come. Goliaths are a part of life.

The Goliaths of:

Financial struggles,
Plans that fall through,
Unexpected change in our life or the life of someone we love.

The Goliaths of:

Memories that haunt,
Abuse from a loved one or stranger
Bullies at school or work,
National or world news that breaks our hearts and silences us.

The Goliaths of:

A new medical diagnosis,
The crushing death of a loved one,
Our own depression, or the mental illness of a loved one,
Our own addiction, or a loved one's addiction.

There are as many definitions of Goliaths, as there are numbers of us here in the sanctuary this morning.

The Goliaths will come, Goliaths are a part of life.

What I'd like to suggest this morning, is that we let David be our teacher for what to do when the Goliaths show up in our life.

First David remembered who he was and whose he was. He started with the conviction that he loved and followed the Living God, who loved him and was always with him.

When Goliaths come into our lives, may our first thought be, I am a child of the Living God.
No matter how tall our Goliaths are, no matter what armor they are wearing, no matter what they are shouting at us,
We are children of the Living God.

Then Saul tried to give David his armor. It was a protection that David didn't need. In fact he couldn't even walk when he had it on.

David took off what others thought he needed to face Goliath.

David trusted himself and the ways God had helped him in the past.

David remembered who he was, and whose he was and God's past faithfulness.

David dressed himself in those truths.

Then David took time to prepare for Goliath, by choosing five smooth stones from the stream bed. He chose his weapons for facing Goliath.

What I'd like to suggest this morning, is that part of facing our Goliaths is choosing our own five smooth stones to take with us into battle.

The Goliaths will come, Goliaths are a part of life.

You may have come to worship today with a Goliath already present on your battlefield.

So trusting that you are a child of the Living God, remembering how you've seen God's protection in the past, what are the five smooth stones you will choose to carry with you into battle?

Each of us will answer this differently. Each of us will name different ways that we will figuratively arm ourselves when the Goliaths of life show up. As I thought about this morning's sermon I made a list of what my five smooth stones are. Please remember these are the stones I choose, not what I choose for you. Although you are welcome to any of them of course!

1. My first stone is from the beginning of John's gospel: "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never overcome it." (John 1:5) God's light is always stronger.
2. My second stone is that God knows me. In Isaiah 43:1 God says: "I have called you by name, you are mine." And in John 10:14 Jesus says: "I Am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me."
3. My third smooth stone is that nothing can separate me from the love of God. Romans 8:38-39 reads: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."
4. Fourth, God's love is stronger than fear. I John 4:18 says "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."
5. My fifth smooth stone is the absolute relief that when I don't know how to pray God's Spirit prays for me. Romans 8:26 says: "Likewise the (Holy) Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words."
6. And because we shouldn't let this story completely dictate how many stones we collect, I have a Sixth Stone, which is my friends who love and support and pray for me.

David took time, in the midst of battle, to prepare.
 He took time to stop and pick up his five smooth stones.
 I hope that today, or tomorrow, or the next time that Goliath is looming on the horizon,
 that you will take the time to really think about the five smooth stones
 that you want to carry in your pocket, or shepherd's bag or your heart.

Because the Goliaths will come, Goliaths are a part of life.
 But as David teaches us this morning, the Living God of our lives is stronger than any Goliath.
 And we will be well defended by the Living God, and five smooth stones.