

“Sunday School Revisited: I - Facing Giants”
Karen F. Bunnell
Elkton United Methodist Church
May 30, 2010

I Samuel 17:1-49

A number of years ago, at my last church, I officiated a wedding where the groom was an offensive lineman for the San Francisco 49er's. He was six feet, five inches tall, weighed about 300 pounds, and there wasn't an ounce of fat on him. Not only that, but all of the men in the wedding, all of the groomsmen had also been drafted by teams in the NFL, so it was a mighty impressive sight. I almost asked them to sit for the whole wedding, because they were so big and tall you couldn't see what was going on around them. But I didn't, because who's going to argue with big guys from the NFL?

They were an impressive looking bunch, and I wouldn't want to have run into them in a dark alley, not knowing who they were. Just the sheer size of them was enough to put the fear of God into you.

Sounds a little bit like this morning's lesson from the Hebrew scriptures, doesn't it? Only it was just one big man, but what a big man he was. The great writer Frederick Buechner once described Goliath this way: “Goliath stood ten feet tall in his stocking feet, wore a size 20 collar, a 9 ½ hat and a 52-inch belt. When he got his full armor on, he not only looked like a Sherman tank but weighed like one.”

Actually, the scripture says that Goliath was 9 feet 9 inches tall, and was covered in bronze - helmet, armor, and spear. He was a Philistine, at war with the Israelites, and as we encounter him this morning, he clearly has the upper hand in the battle. No one on the Israelites' side was ready to take him on - for obvious reasons.

Then along came David. You all know David from your Sunday School days. Actually, that's why I picked this story for the first sermon in this five-week sermon series called “Sunday School Revisited.” Because everybody knows about David - David the musician, David the psalm writer, David the King, David and Bathsheba - almost everybody knows something about David.

Well, this episode happened early in his life - while he was a shepherd,

the youngest son in a brood of many sons, the cast-off son in many ways, because he was young and inexperienced. This happened before he was king, before he even heard of Bathsheba, before almost any of the stories you know about him - ah, but after he had been called by God to do special things with his life.

So back to the story - David goes out onto the battlefield actually to bring food and other supplies to his brothers - and he sees the situation at hand - one big old giant holding, in effect, a nation at bay. Nobody was willing to stand up to the plate and take him on. Who, with any sense would, for goodness' sake?

Surely, every single person there was stunned when David volunteered for the job. And surely, there were not a few chuckles and guffaws over the obvious mistake he was making. Goliath would eat him for lunch!

Despite the obvious, David stood his ground, and argued as to why he could do it, and finally, Saul agreed. As David prepared to go into battle, Saul tried to at least equip him, and gave David all of his battle gear, which must have been a sight, for it was far too big for David, and after struggling with it, he cast it aside, and headed off to face the giant.

I'll bet if old Goliath had worn glasses, when he saw little, scrawny David approaching him looking for a fight, he would have taken those glasses off and tried to clean them - certain he was seeing things! That little kid couldn't be thinking he would fight him, and yet he kept coming closer.

For a while they traded barbs, Goliath putting David down, and David lifting God up. And then, in a moment, in the blink of an eye, David took a stone out of a bag at his hip, loaded his slingshot, fired away, and boom, down went old Goliath, with a thud. And the nation of Israel was saved.

Do you remember learning that story when you were a child? It was larger than life, a fairy tale, something you would never forget. Yet, it's more than that, and it has so much to say to all of us, no matter what our age or station in life. Actually, I think the older we get, the more this story has to say to us, or better yet, the more we understand it.

Why? Because we understand that life is filled with facing giants. Oh, hopefully none of us have to face physically imposing giants meaning to do us harm, but all of us at one time or another face giants of a different sort. If you've lived any time at all, you've faced them. Situations that threatened to overwhelm you, decisions that could make or break your life, challenges that seemed to offer no way out. Some here may be facing those giants even

today.

When you're facing something like that, you know a little bit what David was feeling as he caught his first glimpse of Goliath. Man, this is big! This is overwhelming! This can do me in!

Young people face those giants everyday - with pressure from their peers, pressure to take drugs or drink, pressure to cheat, pressure to go too far in their personal lives, pressure to make decisions about their futures. Those giants seem insurmountable at times when you're a young person.

They're still there as you get older, but they look different. The giants look a little more ominous - seeing people around you getting laid off and waiting for the shoe to fall in your direction, or worse yet, hearing those words, "we don't need your services anymore." Hearing a doctor say, "The test results are not good," or "the treatment didn't work." Watching a loved one suffer. Watching a loved one die. Hearing your spouse say, "I'm leaving for somebody else." Looking at your checkbook and knowing you can't pay your bills. Seeing another Mother's Day or Father's Day go by with no contact from your children.

I don't need to go on, because you know the giants you have faced. And you know what it feels like to face them. Sometimes moments of panic, moments when you're sure you can't handle it, moments of knowing that what you decide is critically important and you're not sure you know what to do, moments of fear, moments of discouragement.

My friends, when those moments come, that's precisely when we need to remember this old Sunday School story the most! Because remembering what David did, how he handled his giant, will be invaluable in helping us handle our's. So let's go back to the story.

One of the things David did was realize that even though it didn't appear he had all the qualifications to fit the job, he did have a lot, and he lifted those things up. He reminded Saul that he was a shepherd, that he had spent his young life protecting others, his herd, and he was good at it. He had saved them from their predators. And now, he could do it again, right there, against Goliath.

You see, rather than dwell on his weaknesses, David focused on his strengths. He didn't fit their bill, but he had plenty of things going for him, and he focused on them, his strengths.

You know, I read this week about a man named Charlie Boswell.

Anybody ever hear of him? Charlie was blinded during World War II, but in spite of that, he became the 13-time United States blind golf champion. Incredible! In 1958, Charlie was awarded the Ben Hogan award for his accomplishments, and of course, he got to meet the great golfer Ben Hogan in person!

When they met, Charlie said, "Mr. Hogan, I'd love to play a round of golf with you." Hogan said that he would be honored to play with him.

"Well, there's just one thing, Mr. Hogan," Charlie replied, "would you like to play for money?"

Hogan said, "I can't play for money, that wouldn't be fair!"

"Chicken, Mr. Hogan?" Charlie said with a smile.

"Okay," Hogan fired back. "You're on. Name the time and place!"

A very self-assured Boswell responded, "10:00 . . . Tonight!"
(On-line, Dave Wilkinson, "David and Goliath")

It appears that Charlie Boswell took a page out of David's playbook, he played on his strengths, he knew what he didn't have, but he also knew what he did have, and he played on those strengths.

Not a bad thing for us to remember when we face our giants. None of us is totally unequipped to handle adversity. Everyone of us has been given unique gifts by God, and those gifts have been given that we might be able to deal with all that life throws our way. God did not send us defenseless into the world, but gave us gifts to use, and one of the ways we can face the giants in our lives, is to remember and use the strengths that God has given us.

A second thing that David did was not let what other people thought of him or the situation stop him. If David had listened to his brothers or Saul or Goliath for that matter, he would have turned and high-tailed it out of there as fast as his legs would take him. But he didn't, he had the presence of mind to listen to what others said, and then use what was good, and ignore the rest.

I don't know about you, but in my life, there have been times when I've struggled to not let what other people think or say, get in my way. For good or ill, people are more than ready usually to offer their opinion, solicited or not solicited. The mark of maturity is to sift through it all, use what is good and ignore the rest. Even at his young age, David showed that maturity.

Finally, and most importantly of all, David knew that God was with him, and would carry him through this battle. He spoke eloquently about how God had been with him throughout his life, and if God had done that, he was certain that God would be with him on the battlefield against Goliath. When everyone around him focused on the giant, David focused on God.

David seemed to know the truth of a profound statement that I read this week that goes like this: “The task ahead of you is never greater than the power behind you.” (On-line, Sermonillustrations.com)

David knew that the God who had given him what he needed to protect his sheep from predators, the God who had called him to service, the God who raised him up in a family of strong brothers, the God who created the world and everything in it, was the very same God who would not forsake him now - as he faced his giant. With God, David knew, all things were possible, even conquering this impossible situation!

There is no greater lesson we can learn from this old Sunday School story than that - that the task ahead of you is never greater than God - the power behind you. There are people in this very room that know that already - maybe you are one of them.

You faced cancer and fought it with God. You survived a great loss - a marriage, the death of someone you love, the loss of a career - but you survived it with and by the grace of God. You said no to your friends when they urged you to drink or use drugs, and you did it because God was with you. I could go on and on, but only you know the giants you have faced, and you know that you did it because of the power behind you - God.

So, today, if you find yourself standing in front of a giant in your life, go back to Sunday School and remember David and Goliath. You can do it, you can handle it, you can get through it. Remember the strengths God has given you, listen to others, remembering the good and ignoring the rest, but finally, and most importantly of all, know that “the task ahead of you is never greater than God - the power behind you.”

I close today with a prayer by a preacher named Lindley DeGarmo. (On-line, Lindley DeGarmo, “David and Goliath”) May it be your prayer this day.

Let us pray:

Lord, we confess that too often we are like Saul, cringing in our tent,

hiding from the giants of our world. We do nothing and hope the giant will go away. We are held hostage by the power of evil both outside us and within us. We confess that often when we do go forth we do so more in self-confidence than in God-confidence. Lord, give us faith and courage not only to leave our tent but also to step out from behind our armor. Give us strength to be our own natural selves, weak, small, and flawed, but filled with confidence in you that through your grace you can make us victorious.

Lord, some of us are fighting bears and lions right now. Give us hope that somehow it all fits into your plan. Remind us that in all things you work for the good of those who love you. Lord, may this be a week, throughout this land, that we hear the rattling of windows as giants hit the ground. We pray in your holy name. Amen.”