

## **Sermon: David and Goliath**

6/20/2021

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

A few weeks ago, we heard the Israelites plead with Samuel for God to send them a king. The Israelites wanted to be strong, prosperous, and respected like the nations around them, and they had come to believe that the best way to do so was by having a king reign over them. But they already had a King in God, who by this point had grown quite tired of their repeated unfaithfulness. So God agreed to give the Israelites what they wanted, but only if they were willing to first accept the consequences of their decision. “There will come a day,” we hear Samuel tell them, “when your king will take your sons and send them into battle, take your daughters as his servants, take possession of your best fields, vineyards, and olive orchards, and put your slaves and livestock to his work. On that day, when you cry out because of your king, do not look to the Lord for an answer.” Soon after accepting the terms of this agreement, the Israelites were given Saul to be their king and would have to come to grips with what having a king would entail.

In the beginning, Saul seemed like the ideal king. He is described as having been humble, tall, and handsome, and under his rule Israel proved victorious in battle against the Amalekites, Ammonites, Edomites, and Philistines. But as the years passed, Saul began to lose his way and, by extension, all those things that God had warned them about began to become true. Saul disobeyed God’s will, leading God to eventually regret having made Saul king and send out Samuel in search of another. Last week, we heard the story of when Samuel went out in secret and anointed David the future king of Israel. Not long after war descended upon Israel once more. Except, this time it was the Philistines and not the Israelites who held the upper hand. By

all accounts, the Philistines were dominating in battle, making their victory all-but-assured. Rather than continue with the fighting, however, they decided that matters should be settled with a duel between champions from the two nations. As we all know, their champion was Goliath.

Goliath is described as having been ten feet tall and having had so much armor that he had to get someone to carry his shield for him. Like that fish that grows larger with each retelling of the story, my guess is that Goliath was not actually ten feet tall. But it is fair to assume that he was a mountain of a man, whose mere presence instilled fear in his enemies. Now, Saul should have been Israel's champion. In addition to being quite tall himself, he had plenty of armor of his own. But when Saul and his army saw who they would be fighting, they were "dismayed and greatly afraid." For forty days, Goliath came forward and issued the challenge—to fight him to the death—never receiving a response. Only then did David arrive at the camp, having been sent there on an errand by his father.

Not long after his arrival, as we heard at the beginning of today's Old Testament lesson, David volunteered to fight the Philistine. In fact, he was so persistent that he gained an audience with the king, who eventually accepted his offer. Most likely, Saul assumed that David would soon die, much like anyone else who agreed to go out and fight. "When faced with the inevitable," I can imagine Saul thinking, "better that this young man die, this nobody, than someone else, someone more important." So Saul offered David his armor, which made it so difficult for David to walk that he eventually took it off. All that David took with him as he went out to face the massive Goliath was his staff, a sling, and five smooth stones that he had taken from the valley floor. Miraculously, that day wit and wisdom defeated hustle and muscle. David beat Goliath, rejuvenating the Israelite army and leading the Philistine army to flee. And the rest, as they say, is history.

One of the reasons why we like the story of David and Goliath so much is because it confirms something our society teaches us. That we should stand up for the little guy. It's why we celebrate the big upset in sports, why books like *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy are so beloved, and why movie franchises like Indiana Jones and Star Wars can still fill movie theaters, or at least hopefully will once more one day when this pandemic has passed. We have been taught to view ourselves as David, as the ones who must continue fighting for what is right, even in the face insurmountable odds. That's what society teaches us, to see ourselves as David. So why then, I can't help but wonder, does it seem like we spend so much of our time and energy trying to be Goliath?

Think about it. Why do we seek to attend the best schools and get the best jobs, and why do we outfit our cars and homes with things like locks, alarms, and security cameras? We do so because they are the armor and weapons of our time. They are the things that protect us from the outside world, that make others respect us and not seek to do us wrong. "Yes," we think to ourselves, "it's great that David got by with five smooth stones and a sling, but why only have those when you can have things like swords, spears, and javelins?" Things that Goliath had and David chose to go without.

And why are mainline Christians, like us United Methodists, always feeling so panicked? During the last fifty years, membership in The United Methodist Church has declined by 28 percent, or nearly 3 million people in total. There's no denying that's a big decline. Then again, what's exactly is the big problem with that? Just because fewer people attend church doesn't mean that Christianity is any less true. For years, we have assumed that the church is supposed to be Goliath. That we should be sought out, have every seat in our sanctuaries filled, and have a prominent voice within our communities, nation, and world. Like Goliath, we're supposed be big

and powerful, respected and admired. We're not supposed to be small and unassuming like David.

But there's a painful irony about David. The David we meet in today's Old Testament lesson is someone filled with confidence, faith, and hope. He is someone who trusts in God and his God-given abilities enough to tell Saul that he doesn't have the heavy armor and to show Goliath the limitations of being big and powerful. David defeated Goliath, the one who couldn't be beaten, leading the people to rally around and eventually embrace him as their king. That's when the terrible irony began to kick in. Gradually, David became Goliath. He became the type of king that God had warned the Israelites for so long about. He became the big, powerful bully that he had made his name defeating, sacrificing so much of the confidence, faith, and hope that he had held in his youth.

One of the many titles that we Christians give to Jesus is Son of David. But to which David, I wonder, are we referring? Are we thinking of the David who became Goliath or the David who overcame Goliath? It can be tempting to view Jesus as the King of the Jews, as someone with such power and might that he can calm a storm with a single word, as we heard in our Gospel lesson, and who can conquer everything, including sin and death. After all, what do we have to fear as Christians when this Jesus, this Goliath, is on our side? Except, the Jesus we read about in Scripture is not some cosmic bully. He is not someone changing the world with displays of power and might, regardless of what the people think. No, he is someone who changed the world by demonstrating his love for us, love for us time and time again.

Jesus wasn't interested in becoming Goliath because that's not who God is and how God works. What David failed to realize that day is that the sling and stones can become just another means to becoming Goliath if we lose sight of the heart of God. David eventually did lose sight

and so have most of us at one point or another in our lives. Maybe that's the place where you find yourself right now, struggling with your faith and questioning the love of God amidst all the suffering and death that we've experienced over the past year. If so, if that is you, my suggestion would be that you take a page from today's Old Testament lesson. That like David, you seek to find joy in the ordinary, whether that be looking after your father's sheep in Bethlehem, tending to your garden outside, or watching a show after a long day at work. That like David, you find comfort and confidence in who you are and the gifts which God has given you. Gifts and graces which may seem inconsequential to some but are capable of making a real, lasting change in this world. And finally, that like David, you seek to place your trust in God, both in good times and the bad, so that you can confidently proclaim, "I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts," like David said that day. But most of all, though, my hope is that each one of us will resist the temptation to think of God and ourselves as Goliath, and instead view Jesus as our Good Shepherd and view us as sheep under his loving care and guidance. That we all seek to be a little bit more like the David who overcame Goliath than the David who became Goliath. And all God's children said, amen.