

1 Samuel 17:32-49

New Revised Standard Version

David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth." But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God." David said, "The Lord, 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." So Saul said to David, "Go, and may the Lord be with you!" Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul's sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them." So David removed them. Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field." But David said to the Philistine, "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 and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, 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 he will give you into our hand."

When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

This is the best known of all the stories of David. Most people are familiar in some way with the story of David and Goliath, the classic underdog story.

This month we are looking at the earliest leaders of Israel. By looking at how they lead, we will see how we want to be a leader where we are. We read a story about a resourceful child winning against the odds over evil forces. But this story isn't simply a matter of rooting for the underdog. This story embodies the hope of all people when faced with overwhelming and evil power, showing them it is possible to overcome that power.

This story has been retold by people who see themselves as David, as weak, oppressed, the marginalized, faced with the giants of oppression. These are people whose only hope lies with God. Their own courage and resourcefulness will not be enough. It is the oppressed and the marginalized who know better than most of us that the Philistines of the world cannot be bested on their own terms. Whole systems of power, technology, and violence cannot be beaten by creating counter systems of power, technology, and violence.

When it seems like there is no way forward, we trust in God and have hope there is a way into the future. We pray for a chink in the impregnable armor. We pray that a well-placed stone of opposition can bring down what may seem like impregnable systems of oppression. We have to continually relearn this lesson of God-trusting opposition to oppression.

We have seen the collapse of the Berlin Wall and all that it symbolized. We have seen the end of the system of apartheid in South Africa. These are all examples of God-trusting persistence in the face of giants. As leaders we have to remember the arc of justice and our need

to continue its efforts. The needle for justice moves little by little when we keep pushing for justice and equity.

Greenland Hills has been a place that has worked for justice, it is how we share God's love in concrete ways. We have been a place that has said everyone is welcome, there is a place for you here. That's why Narcotics Anonymous has met here for over twenty years. That's why when one of church members shared about being transgender, they were embraced with love and celebrated with joy. A few weeks ago we had two folks visit Greenland Hills and they said they were looking for a gay-friendly church. That is the response that people most often give when I ask what brought them to this place. People are looking for a church that celebrates their relationship, that celebrates them. That couple didn't come back and they join many other people that can't be a part of a United Methodist church because the UMC as a whole doesn't allow same-gender weddings or ordain gay clergy.

We have been talking about affiliating with the UCC and the UMC. We want to stay in the UMC because we want to change it. As our rainbow-colored banners say in Glory Be Hall, we stay to stand with our LGBT family. The UCC structure allows every church to decide for itself what is best for them. They ordain gay clergy and host same-gender weddings. They are a progressive, social justice-oriented denomination. David says in this story that he is fighting Goliath so that "all may know that there is a God." What kind of God do we want people to learn about here at Greenland Hills?

In this story of David and Goliath Saul can think of nothing more to do than to poorly imitate the very forces of oppressive power they oppose. David bangs around in the armor of Saul trying to imitate and beat oppression on its own terms. He finds the courage to tell Saul he can't walk because he isn't used to this armor, so he takes it off and goes back to what he knows, five smooth stones, the shepherd's bag, and the sling. David knew himself. He lived in his own skin and used the strengths he had.

We at Greenland Hills know who we are. We are called to use the strengths we have and proclaim the expansive love of God for all people because it is God's ways that save, not the ways of Goliath. God doesn't use our usual ways of measuring influence and power. God wants us to use our strengths and be authentic to who we are as followers of Jesus in this place. We are called to keep discovering who God wants us to be here at Greenland Hills as we lean into our strengths and wear armor that fits us. What is God calling us to do and be?

Today is Father's Day and just like Mother's Day it isn't an easy day for everyone. We think of fathers who didn't love us as we needed or who are no longer here to love us in person. One of the things that my dad did is that he showed up. When I had a soccer game, he was there. He was probably yelling at the refs for what he thought was a bad call, but he was there. I knew that my dad loved me because he showed up. My dad drove me to college and that three hour drive from Houston to San Antonio took much longer because my dad's 1979 Chevrolet van died an hour outside of San Antonio. My dad convinced the auto repair person to drive him to the airport so he could rent a car, come back and get me and some of my stuff, and then my dad made as many trips as it took to cart all of my stuff to college. It has been amazing to me to see how my Southern Baptist dad has embraced his Methodist preacher daughter who preaches inclusive love to all people. He may not understand me, but I know that he loves me and that he is proud of me.

This story of David and Goliath reminds us to rely on God as we live in our own skin using the strengths and skills we have been given. We do not need violence and power to fight an entire tribe of people. Our strength in numbers is necessary to line up on the side of love,

overpowering love, collective love that shows up to remind us that love wins. We have to have courage and remember that a well-placed stone is always superior to the armor of a Goliath. Thanks be to God, Amen.