

**”WHEN KING DAVID WAS A BOY”**

**Text: “You will not be able to fight with Goliath for you are just a boy and he has been a warrior all his days. “**

**I Samuel 17: 33**

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**Let me teleport you back to 1000 BC, 3500 years ago, to the land of Canaan at the time when Saul, the son of Kish was King over Israel. Not long before we arrive, the people of God had grown weary with their political process (what else is new?) and they told the Lord that they wanted to have a King to rule over them, just like their surrounding neighbors. God did not want to do it, but he seems to have yielded for he sent his Prophet Samuel to anoint Saul as King. For a while it all went well. Saul was tall and strong and forceful. He was successful in battle against their archenemy, the Philistines. Hurrah for Saul.**

**But then one day, inexplicably, he disobeyed a command of the Lord. He held back some of the spoils taken from the conquered enemy, and he used them for his own purposes, albeit good. Naturally, God was angry. The Bible says “The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul”. Oh dearie me. That’s the worst possible thing that could happen to a person. God walked away and Saul began to be troubled by an evil spirit. Poor Saul.**

**I have often wondered why he did it. Saul had everything a man could want, and he ruined it. Do you know why? Could you tell me why perfectly sane people do stupid things and bring disgrace on themselves and worry to those around them? If you do, please come up here and preach the rest of this sermon. For, I don’t know. I am forever puzzled at how a man or woman or young person, who has everything, goes darting off recklessly and ends up on the ash-heap. Or why a person with a happy home and loving family will destroy it all on a whim, or by refusing to give up a consuming habit, or by plain selfishness.**

**That is what happened to Saul. Biblical exegetes and psychologists and speculate on what was wrong with him. They attach all kinds of fancy names to his illness. Some are no doubt right. But a technical analysis of Saul is not the point. What God was doing is. I will tread lightly for we all know people who are plagued by mental illness. I do not want to imply that it will all go away if the person would only get right with God. Sometimes emotional disturbances are worse than physical. It can be a long and tortuous road.**

**But in this case the Bible is clear: an evil spirit entered Saul at the exact same moment that Saul turned his back on God. Then, God returned the favor: he turned his back on Saul and walked away. And The King was tortured for the rest of his life, and as you probably know, he finally fell on his own sword and committed suicide. But for our story today, Saul was still King, even if he was becoming more than a trifle erratic in his rule. Samuel still feared him as the Anointed of the Lord. Samuel was perplexed.**

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**Enter God again. It says the Lord spoke to Samuel in words that might sound harsh to anyone within the sound of my voice who has ever lost a loved one. The Bible says that there is a time to mourn; but there is also a time to move on. I Samuel 16 begins with God asking abruptly: “Samuel, how long will you grieve for Saul? I have rejected him. Fill your horn with oil and set out to Jesse’s house in Bethlehem, where I have provided myself a king among his sons.” In other words: Saul is history. He had his day. It was good while it lasted. But it’s over. Now it is time for someone else. Move on to the future, Samuel, “Go down to Bethlehem and find a new King.”**

**It might sound a little coarse; but that’s the way God does things. Like, when Rachel died in childbirth at Bethlehem centuries before, her husband Jacob was devastated. He loved Rachel so much that he spent 14 years working on**

her father's farm for free, so he could have her as his wife. Life would never be worth living if he ever lost her; but he had. I think he would just as soon have ended it all right then and stayed there with Rachel. But.....there were the children to rear, including a new born son. And, God had other things for him to do. So the Bible says that he set up a pillar over her grave, and then succinctly adds:"Jacob journeyed on." not because he wanted to, but because he had to. The future was calling. (Genesis 35:20)

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Well, to get back to our story: Samuel went over to the House of Jesse to meet his sons. Eliab, the eldest, came forward first. He was tall and strong; surely he was the one born to be King. Samuel's job was easy; he was impressed. "But, the Lord said to Samuel: 'No, he is not the one. Don't be fooled by outward appearances. God does not see the way a man sees: humans look at the face, but God looks into the heart.'" (I Sam 16:7) I hope the young people here today are listening. It is what is inside you which matters. We all worry about our outward appearance. We all want to look good. The older you get the harder it is. We all worry about how others think we look, but God does not look at those outward things; he looks on the heart. If you compromise your own heart, you have nothing left worth keeping.

Our culture is fascinated with beauty and charm: tall, tanned, good looking women and tall, rugged, handsome men. That's O.K. I like good looking people too. But a recent magazine surveyed a host of Hollywood starlets, the finest and best. They asked them what they worried about most. What do you think they said? The most beautiful women on the list, names you would easily recognize, said that their #1 worry was how they looked and whether one day they would lose their beauty. Eliab was tall and strong; but he was not the one. God was looking at something else.

**Fred Rogers was a classmate and dear friend of mine: Misterogers. I will always miss him. One of the songs he sang for the wide variety of children, who watched his Neighborhood show is “Everybody’s Fancy” (I promise not to sing it.) It goes like this: “Some are fancy on the outside; some are fancy on the inside; but everybody’s fancy, everybody’s fine. You body’s fancy, and so is mine.”**

**You might have trouble believing it, but I was a little shrimp in high school. When I graduated from Peabody High in Pittsburgh, I was 5 foot five and three-quarters inches tall. I weighed 135 pounds. In our yearbook, I was dubbed the smallest boy in the class. Now don’t anybody laugh: at our 50<sup>th</sup> Reunion a few years ago, I was the largest alumnus there! I didn’t plan it that way; it just happened. I drifted from one year to the next.**

**But, I digress. All seven sons were paraded before Samuel. Not one of them rang the bell. God kept saying: “No, he is not the one.” Finally Samuel asked “Do you have any other sons?” “Oh yes,” he replied, “we have our youngest son, David. He’s out in the field watching the sheep. He is probably playing his little harp and practicing with his slingshot. I don’t know what ever will come of that boy.” Samuel said “Go and get him.” They did. And God whispered to Samuel as David came in: “That’s the one! Anoint him”. Samuel did. And he went away puzzled, but believing.**

**Well, we need to hurry on, but I am sure I can move quickly because most of you already know what happened next. Some of the sons of Jesse were old enough to serve in King Saul’s army and they were up at the battle front. Jesse was worried (This was long before emails and telephones and Blackberries.) He sent little David up to take some victuals to his brothers**

and to bring word back home how they were managing. Their father was naturally worried about them.

David arrived just at the time that a veritable Giant of a man from the Philistines' side of valley was taunting Saul and his army. He was huge: six cubits and a span: some say, to exaggerate a little, some translate it to say he was 9 feet tall.) His bronze coat of mail alone weighed 125 pounds. The enormous bronze helmet covered most of his face. And he brandished an enormous scimitar, a curved oriental sword, which was as long as he was high. His name was Goliath.

Goliath was screaming out loud something like: "You stupid and cowardly Israelites! You have no one over there that can stand up to me. Choose anyone you want and we will settle it once and for all." The Bible says that Saul and all the Israelite warriors were terrified. Then little David came, and the Bible says, "He heard what Goliath said."

David was incensed. He shouted out to his brothers and the Israeli army: "Who is this pagan Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God? ...I will challenge Goliath myself!" His eldest brother, Eliab tried to shush him, saying that he was just a little brother, and should act like one. But, like a lot of little brothers, he ignored Eliab. He went up to King Saul himself and repeated that he was willing to take Goliath on. Saul told David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine; for you are just a boy, and he has been a great warrior all his days." David objected and told the King that while he protected the sheep out on the hillsides, he often had to strike down a raging lion or a bear. I can take care of Goliath. Saul finally allowed him to go. He even outfitted him in his own suit of armor, but it was too heavy and cumbersome for David to wear. "He tried in vain to walk."

**So, “David took his staff in his hand, picked up five smooth stones from the creek, put them in his shepherd’s pouch, and with his trusty sling in his hand, he took off to meet Goliath.” When David drew near, the Giant laughed out loud, “Is this the best that Israel can muster, a mere shepherd boy? Am I a dog that you send a child out with a stick to fetch me? Bring it on; I will toss you to the wild animals!”**

**David shouted back, “You come to me with sword and spear. I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the blessed God of Israel whom you have defied and defiled.” You will pay for your slander against the Lord God. Whereupon David put his hand in his pouch, drew out one of the stones, and fired it directly at Goliath. It sank into his forehead at the one little spot which was not protected by his head-gear. And in an instant, Goliath was history. He fell to the ground, dead as a doornail. When the Philistines saw that their Champion was dead, they fled like cowards. David took the sword and armor of Goliath back to his own tent, as souvenirs. End of story, for today anyway: although there are a thousand things more that we could say about David and his times.**

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**Well, we need a little sermon before go, lest I get the reputation of being a story-teller. I wonder where this story takes you. In the land where you live and walk and talk and ponder day by day, I wonder what you have already garnered into your own private storehouse. Let me suggest a couple of areas where it might apply:**

**The first is a caution, and a promise, to those of you who have children and are trying to direct them into the right path, and sometimes it does not go the way you want it to and there is tension in the once peaceful home, I direct this comment to you: the events of the moment are not be the end of the story. If things in your family are going sideways or backwards, as they sometimes do, think of Jesse. Remember I told you how he thought his son David was idling away his time playing with his little harp and tossing his sling-shot all around the back yard. But God was not finished with David and God is not finished with any of us yet either.**

**Before long David was called up to attend to Saul when the evil spirit was over-taking the King, and Saul was storming about the Palace, raving mad. They looked for someone who knew how to play the lyre and David was brought in to play his little harp (lyre) to soothe Saul. Music can be soothing. And, when he faced the Giant Goliath, the weapon he chose was his trusty little slingshot. God always know what is coming next; we seldom do.**

**My Aunt Mary, the last living member of her generation in our family, told me not long before she died that she was absolutely amazed that I ever became a preacher. She had a good memory. “And it sure surprises us, she said, that you wrote all those books. We can’t figure out where you learned all those words”. I smiled and said, “It surprises me too, Aunt Mary, our God is a wonderful God.” You never know what God has in mind for your child.**

**Secondly, to the young people within the sound of my voice, some of whom we honor today, we are proud of your accomplishments. We are proud of the awardees but we are proud of each one here. I heard once that of all the boy scouts who start the program, only 2 or 3 per cent make it to the rank of Eagle. I want you to think of yourself as a modern day David. Go for the top.**

**I encourage you to step up and out for the goodness of the Lord. The Bible tells you “Remember your creator in the days of your youth”. The Lord Jesus Christ will be with you for all of your days. God and one are a majority. ”If God be for us, who can be against us?”**

**There are many Goliaths strutting around in the world today; some of which taunt the Living Christ. Several best selling books declare the end of the Christian age, as if Christ were here just for a while. New times do demand new responses and they surely require new weapons to fight with, that is for sure. But the one enormous battle of your lives, one which your parents and grandparents fought and fight, is to be sure you remain true to the Living God who cares for us, and for all his creation in Jesus Christ.**

**Your Goliath might be the temptation to go along with the crowd. Your Goliath might mean you have to stand up and fight against a compromise of your personal values. You might become unpopular in that quest. The Goliath you fight might not be a huge raging warrior racing the valley, though goodness knows that evil has been let loose in the world. And the battle still continues. Or, your Goliath enemy might rather be the struggle with your own heart mind and soul, to decide which kind of person you will be and how you will invite God to use your life.**

**I had a professor in college who spoke to the class after the first examination of our freshman year. Some thought he was too tough. They thought they deserved a higher grade. They assured him that they would do better the on the next exam. Dr. Newman replied: “That might be true; anyone one of you could do better the next time. But I have not found it that way. Most students actually finish the way they begin.” Most of us finish the way we begin. There are some surprises along the way, but not many.**

**You are at an important time of your life. You can look out at the coming world and ask “What can I do? How will I use this gift of life?” But I warn you. You will turn around twice and you will be 45 or 59 or 71. And in an instant, the tense of the question has changed. It will no longer be, “What can I do?” but, “What have I done?” And the way you answer it then will depend on what you determine now. Most of us finish the way we begin. Anchor your life to something beyond yourself, above the transitory pleasures of the moment; then you can take on all the Goliaths you will ever face. Come in the name of the Lord and Christ will give you all the strength you need.**

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**Third and last, the final point: I turn to the rest of us, those who have a few more days and decades on us than the younger ones here. Where do you see yourself in the story? Are you being faithful to the Lord and keeping up with the game plan that God has laid out for you? And more importantly, where or who is your Goliath and how are you faring in the fight?**

**We will part ways here I would guess. I need to go inside me as you will go inside of you. Our talents and skills are different and so are our individual battles and burdens. Perhaps your Goliath is a family problem which will not go away. That giant can wander into any home or life, and take up permanent residents if you do not drive him or it away. Maybe it is a child you worry over. It might be the loss of one you loved too much to lose; and not that you are alone, sometimes it seems like it will never change. Grief is a mighty Goliath!**

**Or, it could be a marriage which has settled in and boredom is its other name.**

**Or, conversely it could be a marriage which will not settle in and angry words are spoken time and time again. Maybe it is some all consuming habit which threatens to destroy you marriage or your life. Or it could be in your workplace or worse, the job you used to have. You need to do battle with it, whatever it is. And you need the right weapons for the fight. If it is something you cannot handle by yourself, then sit down and talk to the Lord, and seek the help you need. You only go around once. When it's done, it's done. Don't waste it! Get all the gusto that you can.**

**Maybe your Goliath is an illness. God bless you. Maybe it looks hopeless and it has gone around the corner and it all might be downhill from here. You still need to fight. You need to align yourself, as David did, with the Lord God Almighty. I read the other day in a wonderful book by Eugene Peterson with the curious title "Eat This Book" which says that we have substituted our panoply of human skills in handling our problems instead of relying on the power and peace of the Living God. You need the right partner to accomplish anything worthwhile. Why not choose the One who will still be there when all your days on earth are through? Times change; each generation fashions its own array of weapons to fight military battles all around the world, but we also need new weapons to do battle with the enemy within. Or better, we need the old ones, tried and trustworthy and true.**

**Homes and individuals have their personal Goliaths; but Churches can have them too. Threatening Giants can sit down in the sanctuaries and classrooms and meeting places of any congregation. Oh dear. I have a friend whose son was recently ordained into the Presbyterian Ministry. He landed up in New York, in a nice looking church, populated with good Presbyterian people, of which there are no finer. But after a month on the job, he called his father**

**and said. I quote: “Hey Dad, I thought Church people were supposed to be nice. They sure aren’t nice up here!”**

**Or maybe, finally, (go gently) there is a Goliath plodding around inside your soul, in the secret places of your heart; and you are getting tired fighting. You feel burned out and feel the need to withdraw. Well, we all grow weary when time and again we face the same old problems and so little change is evident. Churches can go sideways too. They settle in, circle the wagons, and chew on the same old hash. I’ve been there myself, done that.**

**Think of David. He was happy as a shepherd boy, but God said “I have something more for you to do.” The giant Goliaths in our society are threatening to undo us, and we need everyone around to join in the battle. Maybe you can march at the head of the line, or maybe all that you can do is root for the home team, and pray for the effort. God responds to our prayers as well as to our actions. That’s fine; God remembers what you used to do.**

**Finally, think of Jesus The Christ. If any child of God ever deserved a free and easy long and happy, prosperous life, it was he. The Son of God himself, sitting with his Father in heaven. Yet, Philippians says (2:5f.) that he chose to give that privilege up and come down to be with us here, so that we could have life and have it more abundantly, for now and forever more. Amen**

