**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“David and Goliath”**

Rev. David K. Groth

March 20, 2024

1 Samuel 17:3-51

Two armies are drawn up for battle facing each other: the Philistines on one side, the Israelites on the other, no man’s land in between. From the ranks of the Philistines steps forward Goliath. He taunts the entire army of Israel. He mocks them and belittles them. He dares them to send someone out to fight him. The Bible calls Goliath “a champion,” which means he has brawled with others in such contests, always leaving mangled corpses in his wake.

Goliath is, it seems, a freak of nature: taller, stronger, larger. When he put on his full armor, he must have looked like a Sherman tank, and weighed like one too. The mere sight of him strikes fear in the hearts of the Israelites.

Goliath offers a one-on-one contest with any member of the Israelite army. He proposes that whoever is defeated, the entire army from which he comes will become servants of the other. How serious is the proposal? I’m not sure. There’s some precedent in ancient history, but I also know when Goliath fell at the hand of David, the Philistine army fled in fear rather than submit to servitude. So, maybe Goliath’s proposal was just all part of the show to mock and ridicule the enemy. However, going up against him is no joke because he is truly proposing a duel, the result of which will be that one or the other will lie dead.

Enter David, maybe a young teenager. His older brothers are in Saul’s army, but David is too young for military service. Normally, David watches over his family’s sheep, but his father Jesse has sent him with supplies of food for his older brothers who are serving in Saul’s army. David is to deliver these care packages, and then bring back news of their welfare. At the front, David hears the taunts of Goliath, and David’s simple, unspoiled faith in the Lord cannot understand why this Philistine is allowed to ridicule the armies of the living God. David says if no one else will, he will muzzle the behemoth’s mouth.

Hearing someone has volunteered to take on Goliath, King Saul summons David, the shepherd boy from Bethlehem. One glance at the lad tells Saul all he needs to know. David is utterly unqualified. Too young. Too short. Too weak. Too inexperienced. But David will not take no for an answer. He tells Saul how the Lord already delivered him from a lion and a bear and will surely deliver him from *this* beast too. This uncommon trust in the Lord strikes a chord in Saul and he lets David have his chance against the giant.

This too is a surprise in the text. Maybe Saul, just like the Philistines, had no intention of his army becoming indentured servants should David lose the contest. Maybe Saul is thinking to himself, “What’s the worst that can happen here? I lose the kid?”

A touch of humor is added to the account when Saul gives David his own armor. It’s way too big, heavy, and cumbersome. David takes it all off and goes to face the giant with no sword, no spear, no shield, no helmet, no coat of mail . . . just a sling, and some stones from a brook.

David’s sling was not a sling shot, a Y shaped stick or implement. An ancient sling was much more deadly, a pouch with a long cord attached at each end. The slinger placed a stone in the pouch and then created centrifugal force by whirling the sling overhead or to the side. Releasing one cord launched the projectile, at speeds of well over 100 mph. Roman military writer Vegetius recommended Roman slingers practice hitting targets 200 yards out. But at shorter distances, slingers become far more accurate and dangerous. Judges 20 says certain slingers could aim at a hair and not miss (v. 16). As a shepherd, David would have had a lot of time to kill keeping watch over his sheep; it’s easy to imagine him using this time to improve his slinging skills. Still, the sling was viewed as a poor man’s weapon. Well-armed infantrymen who fought hand to hand combat received much more respect.

Maybe this, in part, explains Goliath’s disgust when he sees David stepping forward to challenge him. Huge, muscular Goliath with all his armor finds it insulting to go up against a mere boy with his little sling. He curses David and promises him a humiliating death without a proper burial. His corpse will be carrion for crows and vultures.

David, with his simple, unspoiled faith, responds with these famous words, “You come to me with a sword and spear and javelin; I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts whom you have defied.” At this, Goliath, enraged, starts charging. David also charges forward to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slings it and the stone sinks into the forehead of the Philistine, who falls face down on the ground. Having no sword of his own, David decapitates the former champion using Goliath’s own sword.

Now, the Lutheran question. What does this mean? There are several lessons. First, you have Goliaths in your life, and they come in all shapes and sizes: parents who are divorcing, a bully in the classroom, a failing marriage, a rebellious child, a pile of debt, a habit that is out of control, a devastating diagnosis, even a trauma you experienced as a child. All these can be your Goliath. Your Goliath will mock and deride you. He will make you feel small, weak, and stupid. But in Holy Baptism, you belong to the Lord. You are His child. As Christians we always trust in God’s promises, even more so in times of crisis.

Second, David was confident of victory, but his confidence was rooted in the Lord’s faithfulness to him in the past. The Lord had already delivered David from the bear and the lion. David knew He would also deliver him from this boisterous beast too.

Similarly, the Lord has been faithful to you. Look at your history. See how He preserved you, protected you, shielded you from the worst. That love and grace is not just going to dry up now. As God has been gracious in the past, so He will be in the future. Like David, remember the Lord’s faithfulness to you, and find your confidence in His faithfulness. David was so assured that he charged forward to meet Goliath in battle. As a Christian, you can confront your Goliaths with that same confidence and courage. Don’t slink. Charge, knowing God is with you.

Third, the giant fell at David’s feet not because of David’s superior military prowess. Goliath boasted in his own strength. David boasted only in the Lord, knowing the battle belonged to the Lord.

Never boast in your own strength or wisdom or skills or achievements. It robs God of the glory. David attributed the victory to God, not to himself. You do the same. “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” Any victories in life, big or small, belong to the Lord.

Fourth, David’s life points to Jesus:

* Both come from Bethlehem.
* Both are of the same lineage. Jesus is a descendant of David and is frequently called “Son of David,” also by the crowd that hailed Him as he marched into Jerusalem on a donkey.
* Both are depicted as shepherds.
* Both faced daunting enemies. David faced Goliath. Jesus faced sin, death, and the devil.
* Neither was expected to be victorious, yet both emerged victorious.
* Both are hailed as king.

David was weak but trusted in God’s power rather than relying on conventional weapons. Similarly, on the cross, Jesus did not overcome sin and death by using brute strength. He commended Himself to God, and overcame His enemies through weakness and death.

Finally, this account of David and Goliath anticipates the final confrontation between good and evil at the end of days. It anticipates the complete victory of God over the forces of darkness. It anticipates the Lord fighting for us, and easily winning the victory for us. And it anticipates the never-ending feast of victory with the only true and living God, and with all His saints.

Lord, let it happen, and soon. Amen.