

## God Prepares Us to Face Giants

**Reading from the first book of Samuel, the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter:** **4** And a champion went out from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. **10** And the Philistine said, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together." *About this time, David was bringing food to his brothers in the army. David asked, 26* "...who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" *Saul heard about David and sent for him. David told him, 37* "... The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you!" **40** ... And he drew near to the Philistine. **42** And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him; **43** So the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. **45** Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a 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. **46** This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. **48** So it was, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hastened ... to meet the Philistine. **49** Then David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone; and he slung it and struck the Philistine in his forehead, so that the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth. **50** So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. ...

Many years ago, I talked to a biblical scholar and it was his feeling this story of David and Goliath is a legend. It was told to illustrate what kind of a person David was: brave, resourceful, with a strong heart of faith. Recently, however, I read a book: *David and Goliath, subtitled Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants*. The author accepts the biblical account as true for some very good reasons.

In ancient warfare, there were three types of warriors: cavalry, infantry, and projectile soldiers, that is, archers and slingers. We are not familiar with slings, but our friends who were missionaries in Africa saw young men using slings. They were good - quite good; they could reliably hit birds in flight. The book of Judges refers to "men from Gibeah... who could sling a stone and not miss by a hair's breadth."

To David then, Goliath was a big, slow moving target, a sitting duck for his well-honed ability with the sling. The Israelites would probably have understood what was about to happen when David reached in his bag for a smooth stone – and they would have begun to cheer. And Goliath would have understood, too, for those few, precious milliseconds before the stone hit him in the head at a hundred miles an hour.

And where was God in all this? First of all, David had been a faithful shepherd most of his young life. He had been responsible and cared for his sheep and protected them when danger appeared – to the point of vanquishing lions and bears to save them. Such experiences would have strengthened his courage and deepened his faith, preparing him for that day. But he would have remained unused in the service of Israel had God not given him the conviction he was, not just Israel's Champion, but God's Own Chosen Warrior. Sometimes the greatest miracles involve the transformation of a person's mind.

We, too, at Church of Our Father in Hulls Cove, Maine face giants. The world in which we live is not just apathetic towards Christianity, but often downright hostile. Intellectuals see us as superstitious. Academics see us as ignorant. Moderns see us as out-fashioned. Cynics, who know the price of everything and the value of nothing, see us as suckers.

The author of the book I cited would chide us not to be intimidated by our supposed disadvantages, but to understand and make use of our advantages. And what are our advantages?

We are followers of Jesus Christ, who is, as Peter said, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. We are the heirs of generations of faithful Saints. Our experience walking with Jesus has given us confidence. We practice the Kingdom of Heaven. We carry each other's burdens. We pray. We serve. We give.

This building is a special place. We know the church is really its people and we are not to worship a building. But, as Father Chuck said, this is a Thin Place, a place in the physical world close to the invisible world, which now and then breaks through. Visitors have come here and, before anyone welcomed them or gave them a packet, experienced the Holy Spirit. That happened to Father Bob and Fran the day before they met the Vestry these many years ago. It happened to one of the men in our breakfast group who was at the MDI Partnership service last week. I pray it can be part of every one's experience here.

What is it we are to do? Of course, we need to be welcoming. Telling parishioners at Church of Our Father to be more welcoming is like telling Sue Olson to make better sticky buns. Unfortunately, many of the people we would invite have had little or even bad experience with the church. I know from talking to volunteers with Island Connections and Hospice these same people are searching for community, a place to be valued and find meaning. Christianity is uniquely able to respond to their yearnings, but how do we convey the reality of the extravagant love we have received to someone who may have no idea what we are talking about? Father John has discussed this in his sermons: we need to build a culture of discipleship that is attractive and can speak to people's deepest needs. We do this by studying, praying, and making our selves available, always with an attitude of humility.

This was advertised as a talk on stewardship, so I am asking for your pledges. We live in a world of finite, scarce resources and your treasure is required to help fulfill our mission. I believe Church of Our Father does have a place in God's plan. Let us find and do it.