

“Facing Our Giants”

1 Samuel 17, Selected Verses

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A Sermon Preached by Debbie S. Osterhoudt

One of the most magnificent pieces of art resides in Florence, Italy. It is a 17 foot statue of King David, carved out of marble by Michelangelo in the 16th century. The history of this piece of artwork actually begins about 50 years before Michelangelo began his work on the giant stone. Donatello, another famous Italian Renaissance artist, was initially commissioned to sculpt a statue of David to be housed in the Florence Cathedral. When Donatello received the massive block of marble from a quarry outside of Florence, he detected a flaw running through the center of the stone. He rejected the stone and it remained neglected for decades in the cathedral workshop, exposed to the elements of the yard. Michelangelo discovered the stone, recognized it's inherent flaw, but, none-the-less set about convincing the cathedral authorities to allow him to complete the work, which he did within two years. Michelangelo looked beyond the inherent flaw of the marble stone, which was the cause for Donatello's rejection of the stone, and envisioned what it could be and it became one of the art world's most treasured and magnificent pieces of sculpture – David. The pose of Michelangelo's *David* is unlike that of earlier Renaissance depictions of David. Michelangelo dared to create something unfamiliar and new. All previous depictions of David were of his triumph over the giant Goliath. The battle was concluded and David was victorious. But Michelangelo's David captures in stone the

young David after he has made the decision to fight the giant Goliath but before the battle has actually taken place.

What is it about David that has fascinated and inspired us down through the centuries? As I have considered Paul's list of the fruits of the spirit described in his letter to the Galatians, and in particular the last fruit he names which is self-control, the story of David comes to my mind. The word in Greek means "strong, having mastery over our choices, able to control our thoughts." It is the ability to say "no" to selfish desires and destructive tendencies. David struggles with self-control. Like Michelangelo who brought forth the Spirit of David, chipping the stone away amidst the inherent flaw until beauty was revealed, the biblical writers portray a man who was deeply flawed in many ways. King David's adulterous affair with Bathsheba and his murder of Bathsheba's husband was not one of the biblical narrative's finest hours. But David's faith in the living God, his leadership and his courage in the face of the giants of this world continue to encourage and inspire us today. The story of David is found in the extended narrative of 1 and 2 Samuel; this morning we will consider the story of the boy David, before he is crowned king, and his slaying of the Philistine giant, Goliath.

Prayer for Understanding:

God of eternity, by the power of your Spirit, speak your Word to us this day, that hearing, we may know your truth and live ever more faithfully for you. Through your Word show us who you are and who you call us to be. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Read 1 Samuel 17, selected verses

The Philistine threat to Israel is embodied in the person of Goliath. Goliath towers above all the soldiers of Israel's army. Standing over nine feet tall, he wears 125 pounds of armor, carries a spear that sports a head which weighs 20 pounds, he snarls like a main contender of the World Wide Wrestling Federation on championship night. Muscles rippling, he boasts through the valley: "This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me one man among you who is brave enough to come out and fight me."

Israel is duly impressed and intimidated. Intimidation leads to immobilization. What is one to do when bullied? Who are our giants? The ones who bully, intimidate and consequently, paralyze us? Max Lucado has written a book entitled "Facing Your Giants"; each chapter refers to the story of King David. In the first chapter he says:

"Your Goliath may not carry sword or shield; he brandishes blades of unemployment, abandonment, sexual abuse, or depression. Your giant doesn't parade up and down the hills of Elah; he prances through your office, your bedroom, your classroom. He brings bills you can't pay, whiskey you can't resist, a career you can't escape, a past you cannot shake, a future you can't face. You know well the roar of Goliath."

Every time we stand in front of a mountain which seems impossible to climb, we hear Goliath roar. And we are intimidated. We are afraid. We cower. We complain. We make excuses. We create alternative realities. We blame. And we focus on what we perceive we do not have.

This bullying by Goliath goes on for 40 days and 40 nights – in Hebrew that is synonymous with a very long time.

And here comes David, talking about God. The eighth son of a remote family. His family has been loyal to King Saul, sending the three oldest brothers into battle against the Philistines. But David is too young to fight, so he remains home to help in the tending of his father's sheep. From time to time David's father sends him to the where Israel's army is encamped, carrying food and supplies to his brothers. David hears Goliath's challenge. And David's response to Goliath is different from the war weary soldiers around him. "How dare this Philistine defy the armies of the living God? Are you going to allow him to intimidate you? Where is your faith in God?" Consider who you are. Consider who God is and what God is calling you to do. For the first time David introduces a new factor into the situation – the living God. Self-control; being strong and having mastery over our thoughts and actions. The soldiers mentioned nothing about God, the brothers never spoke God's name, but David takes one step onto the stage and raises the subject of the living God. He does the same thing with King Saul – no chitchat about the battle or questions about the odds. Just a God-birthered pronouncement: "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the bear, he will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

David continues his God talk with Goliath:

"You come against me with sword and spear and I come to you in the name of the Lord Almighty, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I will strike you down, so that the whole world will know there is a God in Israel."

Max Lucado says:

“No one else discusses God and David only discusses God. God-focus versus giant-focus. David sees what others don’t and refuses to see what others do. All eyes, except David’s, fall on the brutal, hate-breathing giant. All compasses, except David’s, are set on the polestar of the Philistine. The people know his taunts, demands, size, and strut. They have majored in Goliath. David majors in God. He sees the giant, mind you; he just sees God more so.”

David rushes out to meet his giant with faith in the living God. Maybe you and I should try meeting our challenges, our bullies, our giants in the eye. Giant of depression, racism, alcohol abuse, insecurity, you are going down. David stared down his Goliath, and we can also.

Mark Twain once said: “The sign of a courageous person is someone who feels fear and still goes on to do what he or she believes is right. Courage is not the absence of fear. It is acting in spite of it.”

David selects 5 smooth stones from the river bed, grabs up his sling shot and goes out to meet the giant. The battle itself is short lived. The Philistine is never permitted to make a first move. He is completely outmaneuvered and defeated just as David envisioned. You see, the truth is, the Spirit of the living God is stronger, more powerful, more creative than all our Goliaths.

We are told by the biblical writer that David was a man after God's own heart. (1 Samuel 13: 14) What did God see in David? He was a man who stumbled as often as he stood tall. He stared down Goliath, but later would be smitten with another man's wife, Bathsheba, and he would take her like she was a possession to be manipulated and commit adultery demonstrating an incredible lack of self-control. He would then have Bathsheba's husband killed in battle to cover up his own sinfulness. David could lead armies but couldn't manage his own family. He could dance before the Ark of the Covenant with abandon, he raged, he wept, he loved, he murdered, he confessed the truth of who he was when confronted with his sins. He had multiple wives but only one God. He was a man after God's own heart. The fact that God saw the flaws in him but still loved him, gives hope to us all. We need David's story. We need to tell the truth about our own flaws and lack of self-control. Giants lurk among us and in us. But the giants are not expecting us to interject the Spirit of the living God into our situations. It throws them off balance, so that they might be defeated.

Giants, we must face them. Yet we need not face them alone. If we focus on what God can do and not on simply what we can do, giants will tumble. This is the promise of the Word of God.