

Faith is the Root of Courage

The lesson for today is from 1 Samuel 17 and you can read along in the bulletin if you wish. (The text copied below is courtesy of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library)

1 Samuel 17:(1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49

17:1a Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim.

17:4 And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.

17:5 He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze.

17:6 He had greaves of bronze on his legs and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders.

17:7 The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron; and his shield-bearer went before him.

17:8 He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me.

17:9 If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us."

17:10 And the Philistine said, "Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man, that we may fight together."

17:11 When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

17:19 Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.

17:20 David rose early in the morning, left the sheep with a keeper, took the provisions, and went as Jesse had commanded him. He came to the encampment as the army was going forth to the battle line, shouting the war cry.

17:21 Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army.

17:22 David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage, ran to the ranks, and went and greeted his brothers.

17:23 As he talked with them, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines, and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him.

17:32 David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."

17:33 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."

17:34 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,

17:35 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.

17:36 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."

17:37 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!"

17:38 Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail.

17:39 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.

17:40 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.

17:41 The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him.

17:42 When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance.

17:43 The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

17:44 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."

17:45 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.

17:46 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,

17:47 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."

17:48 When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine.

17:49 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.

Matthew Kelty is a monk at the Trappist monastery in Gethsemane, Kentucky. He spoke at my seminary in the mid 80's on various things relating to spirituality. He talked about one period of his life when he had been one of 4 Monks who started a mini commune in New Guinea. They would work together, eat together, pray together and serve the people around them.

I'll never forget one thing that Matthew said during his accounting of his time there. Everyday they would all have long periods of solitude in prayer in nature. He would, everyday, go to this one

beautiful spot for his time of solitude and he said there were some mornings when he dreaded with the greatest fear to go there and would have to really battle with himself to make that journey, because he knew who he would meet there. He would meet his inner self, and sometimes seeing oneself can be most terrifying.

Furthermore, he said there were some terrible days that he knows he wouldn't have had the courage to go there, or to continue once he got there but he could do so only with the knowledge that Christ was holding him and embracing him with grace, the Christ who, he himself, knew suffering and mercy.

David Rensberger was/is (?) a professor of New Testament at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta. He wrote an article for the "Weavings" publication in which he refers to a time when he was frozen, unable to act because of his fear of heights. He found he could break through that fear and move only by repeating the words "God is my helper". He wrote in this article, "Fear, as the opposite of hope, results from not trusting God and God's love," and

“I **do** *know* that the divine gift of life experienced in the risen Jesus gives me hope when only fear seems possible.”

In the late 80's people gathered regularly in the East German churches, were inspired, given instruction on nonviolent conflict resolution and given hope, and then so empowered, they left the church, candles in hand in large numbers to protest peacefully against the injustices and corruption of Socialist government that had them imprisoned in their own country, and eventually as a result of their courage, the wall was broken down and the oppressive regime failed.

These three examples are varieties of overcoming fears. In each one we see that Faith was the foundation for the Courage to overcome. We experience internal fears that can freeze us and keep us from experiencing spiritual depth and discovering parts of our own personality that could amaze and delight us.

We also experience external fears that can inhibit us from living our lives to the fullest, like fears of open spaces, fears of unknown violence in public places, and fears of spiders that keep us from enjoying nature just to name a few.

There are also fears that threaten to allow evil to prevail if we don't overcome our fears and act, such as child abuse, road rage, cancer . . . there are myriads of causes out there in the world for which people are willing to overcome their fears and act.

In our sermon text we see that David seems almost reckless in his fearless assertion that he would go fight Goliath! I'm pretty sure we would refuse to let someone as young, enthusiastic, and cocky as him to take on such a task, calling his wisdom into question. And yet, he was so confident that there was no stopping him. David knew who God was, he knew God would help him, so it seems he wasn't fighting off fear and that it wasn't necessarily so courageous of him – it was just normal! His life experiences with God were so real he appeared not to doubt it for a second.

From our Epistle reading we heard Paul writing to the Corinthians about all the things he and his companions are forced to endure to insure their salvation, “through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger . . .” It took a great deal of courage for Paul to do what he did, and yet, time and time again, he made it seem *not* like a fear he had to overcome, but more like a natural act, fueled by his conviction, his missionary calling, the source for which was a great faith in the living God, his vision of Jesus his certainty that Jesus died and was resurrected.

In the Gospel, Jesus comes right out and asks the followers who were in the boats which were being beaten around by the great windstorm, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” Jesus appeared to be growing a bit impatient with his followers who still didn’t seem to realize who they were dealing with. The answer was quite simple and right in front of them; *trust* Jesus, the Son of God, who has authority over natural forces. Put your faith in him and God *will*

achieve his purpose, even through apparent destruction. Faith is the root and source of Courage.

We are called as individual Christians and as a congregation to strengthen our faith and build it to a faith that will withstand the greatest fears and losses. A faith that is so strong that we won't cower in fear when we witness injustice but will be able to act in Christ's name empowered by God's will.

I believe that coming to church and being active in a community requires a great deal of courage, and you all have certainly shown that you have this faith foundation, purely by coming here today.

You have the courage to admit that we all need a structure to get our regular God fix, our spiritual guidance, our empowerment to make it through this challenging world we have here. You have the courage to risk being seen as who you really are. You have the courage to seek the dark places of your souls and to then experience God's providence and truth.

We need to ask ourselves now, what are our personal Goliaths? We all have Goliaths in our lives. Sometimes they come as personality traits that we keep stumbling over, or addictions, or wounds from emotional injuries that have not been healed. Other times our Goliaths stop us from living a full life in the form of a fear that stops us from embracing life to its fullness, such as phobias. And other times our Goliaths are injustices in the world that we see and know are just plain wrong, and yet we feel unable to do anything about them.

We all have “Goliaths” and we all have the potential to be “Davids” and in more than just a name, my son! But we cannot do it alone. We need the compassion and providence of God to surround us and uphold us as we take the internal journey to conquer ourselves. We need the power and the peace of God to help us to challenge our external fears. And we need Godly inspired fellow Christians to join with us to fight against injustices in the world.

Facing our Goliaths is a terrifying thing, and we should never take it lightly, but it is vital that we all know, that we *can* counter all our fears with hope. We experience hope when we trust the life, the teachings, the death and resurrection of the one we are named after, Jesus Christ. Amen