

Sunday 24th June 2018 Christ Church, Grahamstown 8.30 a.m.		5th Sunday after Pentecost 12th Sunday of the Year B
1 Sam 17:3-4, 32-49	Ps 9:9-20	2 Corinthians 6:1-13
		Mark 4:35-41
FIGHTING THE GIANTS WITH THE STRENGTH OF THE LORD		

“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. This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand’ ” (1 Sam 17:45-46a)

Greetings – to all members and supporters of the Order of St John as you gather for your act of rededication; Dame of Grace Bev Wilson; Commander James Hoyle; Nicky Turner, chair of Christ Church Trustees; churchwardens and church councillors here to be admitted into office. Both my daughters, Rachel and Nicola, have been through the St John First Aid course, Rachel to level 3, Nicola to level 1. Thank you, St John!

Background

Our Old Testament reading for today, 1 Samuel 17, continues with the stories of the last few weeks of Samuel and Saul: the call of the boy Samuel; the request of the people for a king like other nations; Saul becomes the first king of Israel; and the anointing of David as his successor.

Why do we read these old stories of people from long ago? To encourage us... to see God working through their lives... their successes... their failures...

God used their fumbling, stumbling, efforts, worked in the imperfections of their lives, their blindness, appalling mistakes and errors and failures for his purposes of salvation – to save them and

restore the community. And it's the same for us! Sometimes because we are faithful, and sometimes in spite of our faithlessness!

And we begin to see our stories, our lives, in the bigger story, the bigger picture that is God's picture.

David and Goliath

The story of the battle between David and Goliath takes up the whole of chapter 17; we have read about half of it.

The place of the story in the life of David is interesting... in chapter 16, we meet David when he is anointed by Samuel as the future king. Meanwhile, King Saul begins to suffer from depression "an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him" (1 Sam 16:14) and David is brought to the court as someone who is a musician, a man of valour, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the Lord is with him" (1 Sam 16:18). He becomes Saul's armour bearer.

Now he is to prove himself in battle. The traditional enemies of the Israelites, the Philistines, are threatening the very life and existence of the nation. The two armies are gathered in battle array, facing one another, with a valley in between them. From the ranks of the Philistines, comes this fearsome creature, Goliath, a mighty warrior, big and strong enough to put fear into any normal man. He was huge. Terrifying. Unstoppable. A tank. A proven warrior. Unbeatable. And with weapons beyond the strength of a normal warrior to use.

He challenges the army of Israel to send out their champion to fight him. The future of the people of Israel depends on the outcome of this single battle. "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 will be our servants and serve us" (1 Sam 17:9)

"When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid." (1 Sam 17:10)

Enter David. He has been sent by his father to bring food for his older brothers, who are in Saul's army. He hears the challenge and the arrogant shouts of Goliath. He volunteers to go into battle. Saul initially brushes his offer aside. "You are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth." (1 Sam 17:33)

David replies with words of faith, a faith forged and strengthened in defending his father's sheep from danger – from lions or bears. He says to Saul, "The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from hand of this Philistine."(1 Sam 17:37).

Saul then agrees to allow David to go into battle. He gives David his own armour, but it is too uncomfortable and clumsy – David is not used to it. Instead, he chooses to go into battle dressed as he is, with his shepherd's staff in his hand, his sling, and five smooth stones from the river bed in his pouch.

He runs out to meet the enemy. Goliath is scornful of this youngster. "He disdains him"- doesn't take him seriously. "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field." As an experienced warrior, victor of many such battles, he knows the outcome – or so he thinks.

But David responds, "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. This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand' " (1 Sam 17:45-46a).

He takes one of the smooth stones, puts it into his sling, hurls it, hits Goliath on the forehead. Goliath is knocked unconscious, falls to the ground. David rushes over to him, draws Goliath's own sword, and cuts off his head.

The ripple effects, the implications, the consequences of David's victory flow on into the chapters, the years ahead. This is a turning point for David and also for Saul. With the scalp of Goliath on his belt, David is no longer the young shepherd boy from the country. He is now someone to be reckoned with. The people of Israel grow to love David and revere him as their battle chief. Saul sees him from now on as a threat to his crown and a rival for the throne.

Fighting the giants with the strength of the Lord

Malcolm Gladwell - "David and Goliath: Underdogs, misfits and the art of battling giants" – how the weak can defeat the strong, the small can match up against the giant...

A young man who grew up with dyslexia, struggled through school, ended up with skills and insights that no class could teach...

"For every difficulty, every hardship, that life will throw at you, you'll learn skills everyone else will wish they had..."

"How to turn every disadvantage in your life into your strongest asset..."

The small business that is able to think laterally, out of the box, and defeat its much bigger competitor, who has become complacent, unwieldy, too big to change...

It is a wonderful story of the bully and the abuser and the oppressor meeting his just deserts. Goliath is a symbol of power run amok. Overwhelming forces ranged against the weak. The unstoppable.

Political cartoon in 1899, start of the 2nd Anglo-Boer War – David (President Paul Kruger, Boer) vs Goliath (General Buller - Great Britain).

Goliath represents the forces of evil and destruction that we face, the giants that we have to stand against, the bullies and abusers that we have to challenge and defeat if we are to survive and find life.

David is the new kid on the block, the innovator, who had to make it on his own, who learned to fight against the bear and the lion with the strength of the Lord, and with the weapons he has to hand. Now he fights against this greater enemy in that same strength – the strength of the Lord.

What are the giants that you and I face? That we face as the church, as the community?

The Order of St John traces its roots back to the 11th century – to care for sick and poor pilgrims. Its mission today: “to prevent and relieve sickness and injury, and to act to enhance the health and well-being of people everywhere in the world.”

What are the giants you face on our behalf? The giants of sickness, ill health, medical care... to be people of compassion...

Churchwardens and church council, what are the giants you face on behalf of Christ Church?

People of God, what are the giants that we face, you and I face?

The giant, the fearsome destructive enemy of corruption and poor governance, so prevalent in our land – and so, churchwardens and church council, together with the trustees of Christ Church, one of your tasks is to ensure that this church is administered with care and diligence, in all aspects of your life together. The Order of St John – in your leadership, likewise you are to ensure that all is done with care, that finances are well administered, that you are true to your vision.

The hidden, inner ministry of sound administration... we can see

when it is not working... the outward ministry of healing, proclaiming the gospel, caring for those in need...

But there is also the giant of fear and despair and apathy, the giant that says – whispers – you can't make a difference. You won't win this battle. There is no point in fighting. Just give up now and it will all be easy. No more fighting. The giant that pushes us down... that saps our courage and resolve... that is a giant that all of us must fight...

The giants that you and I face – failing schools and land struggles; suspicion and distrust; growing unemployment amongst our young people – a storm waiting to break...

What are our weapons? What are our five smooth stones? Eugene Peterson suggests the following: directing prayer; making stories; building community; sharing pain; and “nay-saying” – speaking the difficult truth.

The five wounds of Christ...

The five stones I suggest – courage, vision, hope, trust, steadfastness.

Courage - to fight

Vision - to see new possibilities

Hope, not despair

Trust – that God will use us as we take these steps

Steadfastness - standing firm

The sling – the power and strength of God.

CONCLUSION

Let us fight the giants with the strength of the Lord!

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