

"God and the Giant"

Sermon by Lisa Crismore

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1 Samuel 17:32, 38-52

*David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. 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. 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. The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. 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." 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, who you have defied. 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, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle of the Lord's and he will give you into our hand."** When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. 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. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand. Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it. When the Philistine saw that their champion was dead, they fled. The troops of Israel and Judah rose up with a shout and pursued the Philistine as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron.*

I am not one to overlook the timing of when a precious gift is left at my door step. This wonderful hat (a pink stuffed pig that has strings looped through its arms so that when pulled it can appear to fly) was given to me on Thursday by the TOPS group. They were cleaning out their cabinet and found this treasure. I guess they thought the church could use it. Kim thought I needed it. I tried to give it to Carolyn Lyons who was brave to model it for a Facebook video but when offered, opted not to take it home. So, it came to me that this hat although silly was very fitting for our story today.

Yes, David looked pretty silly to Goliath. Standing in front of the 6 foot 9 inch giant was this small, ruddy, handsome in appearance - shepherd boy. He had no armor, no shield, no-nothing to protect him from the giant that stood in front of him. David had chosen to fight this huge creature of a man. What were the chances of David defeating Goliath who had 126 pounds of armor protecting him? Pretty darned impossible most everyone would say! Or you have heard the term, "Only when pigs fly", right! (I will take the hat off now, to get down to business.) Well, not when it comes to God!

How many people were willing to put money down on David? It certainly would not be the Israelite army who could see clearly that David's size and appearance was no match for his opponent. I don't think his brothers who actually rebuke David in verses 17:28-30, believed he could win. It certainly wasn't Saul. David refused all the armor and protection that Saul insisted he wear. Back in the fields of Bethlehem, he was not use to wearing armor. David is convinced that the only protection he needs is God. Saul's faith in God was at a "zero" at this point.

Perhaps, Jesse, David's father, would be the only one in David's corner besides God and the prophet Samuel. Jesse had faith in his small shepherd boy. Although, I wonder why Jesse sends his son, David, to the battlefield to give food to his brothers and check on them. I can't imagine sending my child when I could go myself. I would guess that Jesse has no clue that David would chose to go up against Goliath. But he knew that David was God's chosen one, anointed by the prophet Samuel. He was there when Samuel called all his boys together and went down the line waiting for God to signal which one it was to be. No one would have guessed it to be David. He was the most unlikely one to be chosen. It is no doubt that his father knew that God's Spirit was with him and that it was as mighty as it was the day God told Samuel to put oil on his skin! Jesse had witnessed this!

David heads out to the Israelite's camp! The story goes on for 47 verses with a lot of conversation and build up to where finally David swiftly kills Goliath with one stone. This is an historic story that we tell over and over to our children. The thing that I don't remember as a child is the violent act of David taking Goliath's sword and slicing off his head. Do most children's books stop after the stone is thrown and Goliath falls down? It is interesting that scripture tells us that Goliath is knocked down with the stone and killed. So, is it just for good measure that David goes one step further or does he have to go through with the threat that he made to Goliath?

The aggressive, violent act of killing Goliath sent a clear message to the Israelites that those who defy the God of Israel will be destroyed. David came as the servant of God to do God's work. It was not really David that Goliath encountered. It was God! God needed to refocus the faith of the Israelites on God and to show them that anything was possible with God. This was God's vision and David was the key to making this all happen.

I have to be honest that after the shootings this past week in Charleston, South Carolina I was having a difficult time with the violence in this story. I am tired of the violence. I am tired of the hatred. I am tired of the sadness. I am tired of people hurting each other.

I realize this story was during the time when the Israelites were fighting against the Philistines. In war, people die. David was up against a bully. He was up against a giant that was pure evil. The focus of this story needs to be on the power of God which allows the impossible to happen. I am sure that is what the people at Mother Emmanuel AME Church will hold onto this morning when they gather for worship. The promise that they can overcome the hatred that has caused great sorrow. How do they know this? I saw a broadcast this last week where this church has been able to overcome great obstacles in its history. After it was formed over 200 years ago by African slaves, this church was destroyed by fire, had to worship underground when black churches were illegal and was demolished by an earthquake. It has overcome many giants by focusing on God and having great faith. When they gather to sing, we will overcome. They know it will be God who will see them through it.

Max Lucado uses this phrase throughout his book, "Facing Your Giants" – "Focus on Giants – you stumble" – "Focus on God – your giants tumble". ("Facing Your Giants" by Max Lucado; Thomas Nelson Publishing; 2006)

I am sure that everyone here has faced giants in their life time. You may be facing one right now! When faced with the giant, I find it very easy to focus on the giant and not God. When facing my giants, I struggle with fear and self-doubt. Interesting, I preached on this text 10 years ago. My giant that I was facing at that time was sending my oldest daughter off to college. I was afraid to let her go. I was not sure how she would do away from her family. I look back today and see that she has grown into a beautiful, successful young woman. I have been able through the power of God to let go and let her be free to grow.

Now, my giant is a little bit more difficult than it was 10 years ago. My struggle that I am facing is "how do I minister to our community?" I don't mean the community inside the walls of the church. I mean the community outside on the streets. We are called to be an open, caring, community. How can I profess to this, if I can't relate to our community or know who to serve them effectively. Kim and I witnessed a domestic violence incident out in our parking lot. It was horrible to stand by and watch. I felt so helpless! The worst thing was the police never showed up after being called. As I see our community change I find myself asking, "How can I make a difference in this neighborhood which I believe God has called me to serve?"

Last week, Hector's sermon really hit home with me. I believe that we are called to act, to do, to sow God's seed and to be there for the least of these. I want to stand up and shout, "YES! I am there!" But, what does that look like? How do I do it and give glory to God's kingdom? The Giant can be overwhelming sometimes especially when our nation experiences a tragedy like Wednesday night. The church is a place where we are to feel safe. I had someone recently tell me that it may be time to lock our doors. But I ask them how do we do this and profess to be an "open, caring, community?" I don't think we can lock ourselves away and not look out into our community to see where we can make a difference.

How do I know that? I see the hope in our community and the need for our ministry by serving the children. The children, who will come to tutoring on Wednesday nights, are the reason. The children, who will come this week for soccer camp, are the reason. The children, who will come for VBS several weeks from now, are the reason. They are the reason I need to face this giant! I am committed to being here but how do I minister to this community? How do we do it as a church?

I always love the way God's timing works in our lives. The youth have been approved to participate in the Center for Congregation's Youth Ministry Grant Initiative. The young people of John Knox want to establish a faith-based Big Brother/Big Sister Program. But how will they do this? I believe the answer lies in looking to Broadway Methodist church who partners with the Center for Congregation. I believe they are the David in our story.

This church that sits downtown Indianapolis can offer some answers. This church can teach us a lot about serving the poor. The interesting thing is they don't give out anything to their neighbors. They don't give out gas or food cards. They don't try and put a Band-Aid on the problem and send the people on their way. They find that they can be good neighbors by just going out and listening to people.

The wake-up call for them came back in 2003 when 9 young people lost their lives to violent deaths over a 9 month period. Many of these youth were students they had tutored in their after school program. They had not taught these students what they needed to know. So, they hired De'Amon Hargis as a roving listener. He goes out and talks to people. He asked them 3 questions:

- What 3 things do you do well enough that you could teach others how to do?
- What 3 things would you like to learn?
- Who beside God and me is going with you along the way?

This is all shared in a wonderful article titled "Death and resurrection of an Urban Church" written by Robert King. They share that "this church is not known now for handing out goods and services but a place to make connections." (faithandleadership.com/death-and-resurrection-urban-church; Faith and Leadership – Duke Divinity; March 2015) This church was dying on the vine back in the mid '90s when they had a total of 75 members. They share that their membership is over 200 now. "The church's resurrection has come from seeking other people's gifts."

As our young people seek the guidance of Broadway Methodist and perhaps other churches, which may have similar programs or serve in similar communities, my prayer is that I and hopefully our congregation can learn from them on how we can be better neighbors. This will probably involve a change in the way I do ministry. It will take time and I will have to be patient with the process. It may take me stepping out of my comfort zone and taking some risk to do ministry different.

Thanks to be to God for giving us this story that is worth telling over and over so that we can hear that it is possible to face the giants in our lives. I give thanks to God who grants us the power to do the impossible. Amen.