

“We May Not be Big, But We’re Small”

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1 Samuel 17:40-50

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Have any of you noticed that there are a few problems in the world? If we were in a smaller space and actually in the same room, I might get you to shout out some issues or concerns that you think about or care about.

You might name the pandemic, homelessness, racism, poverty, domestic abuse, substance abuse, homophobia, the right to clean water and self-determination in indigenous communities.

Maybe you would mention diseases like cancer or malaria. What about the epidemic of loneliness in our communities which the pandemic has made worse?

What about the obscene levels of plastic in the oceans and land and the destruction of ecosystems?

We could spend hours coming up with issues that seem insurmountable.

Even on their own, they are massive and overwhelming. But put together?? Run to the store and grab some storm chips or sneak some of the kids' leftover Halloween Candy, close the curtains on the world, hop into bed and just binge watch Netflix. And, now that The Crown has started season 4, we've got some high-quality binge watching ahead! Seems like a good way to avoid thinking or worrying about all of these situations that I am clearly far too small to do anything about.

These are the things we would dearly like God to fix.



Do you remember the VeggieTales? ... it's a Christian cartoon kid's show where the characters were all vegetables.

One of the songs they sing is "God is bigger than the boogiemán". "God is bigger than the boogiemán, he's bigger than Godzilla or the Monster on TV, oh God is bigger than the boogiemán and he's watching out for you and me."

The good news is that we do have a God who is big and who loves us and who hears the cries of a broken and hurting world.

The bad news is that God rarely answers these problems the way we would want God to. Instead God answers these cries by sending you and me: By deploying the church.

Part of our United Church Creed reads:



*We are called to be the Church: to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation, to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil...*

While there is always room for improvement, I think we do a half decent job on the first 3. But how about "Seek Justice and resist evil"? Do you realize that when you sign up to follow Jesus, when you join the church, this is one of the important ways we are called to live out, to walk out our faith? But how on earth do we do that?

The scripture reading today is the story of David and Goliath. When I think of the task of standing up to evil, this is one of the stories from the Bible that comes to mind. Of course, we notice that David is small and insignificant, and Goliath is huge and heavily armed. There is simply no competition.

But a crazy thing happens: *whether he had the overinflated confidence of youth or whether David was just so filled with the Holy Spirit that his smallness didn't matter in the light of the Lord God of hosts who called him, David steps up to fight the giant.*

I would dearly love to just leave it to the boy wonder David and to modern day Davids to take down the giants—I can happily cheer them on so that I can go on worrying about what to make for supper or where to go on holiday when that vaccine is made available. I would happily leave the work of dealing with giants to the professionals, except that God hasn't called giants to face giants. God calls small and ordinary people like David ... people like you and like me.

I remember several years ago visiting my great-aunt, Dorothea Coates, in her nursing home. She died at the ripe old age of 103. I don't remember how old she was on this occasion, probably over 100, and for many of her twilight years she suffered with dementia. I always introduced myself when I visited and she'd always ask what I did for a living. Her father, my great-grandfather, was a Methodist minister in this area, so when I would tell her I was a minister, she was always surprised. And, when I would tell her I was a minister at Wall Street United Church, she would be almost shocked and disbelieving. Every time she would say: "Well! In *my* day, Wall Street was *the* church!", as if to say the standards of the church must have gone downhill considerably if I was the minister there!

Anyway, on this particular occasion when I visited there were no pleasant re-introductions, because she was uncharacteristically upset. Looking at me like I was a stranger, she cried out: "*Help!*" I asked her what was the matter, but she just cried out: "*Somebody has to do something!*" I looked around the room and took stock of the fact that I was the only 'somebody' around and I would have to do something. Now I know nothing about caring for the elderly, but I did what little I could. I went to the nurses '

station and got a nurse. In the end it turned out she had a painful infection, which can be quite serious in elderly people.

But I have to tell you her words: “*Somebody has to do something!*” still sort of haunt me. Normally you can ignore that voice because there is a world of qualified people. In almost any given situation someone else could do something—someone more competent, more trained, more energetic, more intelligent than me. But when you’re the only one in the room with the person crying out those words, it is a different story. What if we are the only ones in the room?

There’s a verse in the Bible that recently has been calling out to me. The prophet Ezekiel is speaking God’s words and says:
The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery; they have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the alien without redress. And I sought for anyone among them who would repair the wall and stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one. (Ezekiel 22:29-30).

I have a picture of God searching the horizon for someone, anyone who would help, who would do something to repair the damage and face the giants.

The truth is, I have decided to follow Jesus, and when you follow Jesus you become that somebody. When you decide to follow Jesus, you are called to be that somebody: to face Goliath, to make reparations in a broken world, to let your heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God, and to bring new life that even the gates of hell will not be able to withstand.

But again, I come back to how.

There’s a part of the story of David and Goliath story that I hadn’t really noticed before, and it stood out to me as I was preparing for this message. As David drew near to the giant in 1 Samuel chapter 17 verse 40 it reads: “*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.*”

Now, we know that it only took one shot, one stone to knock down and kill Goliath. If David was so confident as to do something as crazy as take on the “Champion” Goliath, why did he pick up 5 stones? Maybe his aim wasn’t always perfect and he just wanted to be prepared?

It could be, but I want to suggest that maybe, just maybe David knew that there would be other giants to face, that it wasn’t just Goliath, and that God would call him to stand up and make a difference somewhere else too.

As I read this story again, (and I just love it how much the scriptures come alive!) I felt I heard God telling me to pick up five stones. Just five! I would encourage you to do the same. Those of you who are in worship were

encouraged to pick up a small bag of rocks on the way in. If you're up to it, open the bag. If you're at home I encourage you to go out and find 5 stones after the service.

Each of these stones will symbolize a giant we are called to face and do something about. So pick up, or imagine picking up, the first stone.

- The **first stone is to fight something that is in me.** Friends, I don't need to tell you that what is going on inside of us is sometimes the biggest giant of all. Name and face one giant inside you that would dearly love to destroy you through addiction, anger, anxiety or simply wants you to miss out on abundant life. You may want to take longer to meditate and pray about this, but just take a moment now and listen to see if the Holy Spirit speaks of a one giant inside you that you are called to do something about ...
- Now pick up a second stone. **The second stone is used to make a difference in the life of someone close to you: a situation in your family, or with a close friend.** What giant can you help take down for someone you love? Where can you bring more life? Just spend a moment thinking about that.
- Pick up **the third stone** and ask how to make a difference in your **community, or in your workplace or institution.** When I prayed about my third stone, I felt God calling me to accept an invitation to be part of a team at St. Lawrence Anglican Church that is coming up with solutions to the increasing homeless problem in Brockville.
- The **fourth stone is to take aim at something that is big and beyond you:** like standing with the Indigenous peoples in this country, like racism or human trafficking.

Pray about what each of those stones should be for you and then pray daily about those people and situations and what concretely you are called to do. God knows your abilities and your limitations. It might be prayer, a phone call, a donation, and it might be educating others, mobilizing a petition, or deciding to work in that area.

- What about the **5th stone?** I haven't forgotten it. **Keep that one as an open stone so God can call on us to see and respond to something new,** so that we don't just pat ourselves on the back and say "I've done my part". If you are open, you might hear God whispering "Say hi to the woman outside the coffee shop, and break through her feelings of deep loneliness and worthlessness."

The Christmas season is almost upon us. One of my favourite Christmas traditions is listening to the story "Dave Cooks the Turkey". How I miss Stuart McLean and the Vinyl Café! Do you remember that CBC radio series? It was a series of stories revolving around a guy named Dave who, in

an era of Big Box stores owned a small, community-oriented record store. The tag line for his store was: “**We may not be big, but we’re small**”. I love that tag line!

I feel like that was David’s tag line and it could be the tag line for the Church. Time and time again throughout the scriptures **God uses what is small to confront and confound evil**. Look at David. Look at the mustard seed. Look at Jesus, born a fragile baby to nobody parents in a backwater place; look at this church, look in the mirror. God uses what is small to bring light and life, healing and love to a broken and hurting world.

We don’t do this to earn brownie points, we do this because there is nothing more incredible than being part of the Church and part of God’s powerful river of life that breaks down barriers and brings refreshing life and hope to everyone and everyplace it touches.

One day God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. But until that time, we are called to work *with* God to bring order to chaos, healing to sickness, reconciliation to division, forgiveness to injury and the power of love to places of fear and evil.

Thanks be to God. Amen.