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Rev. Steve Gillam

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1 Samuel 17: 1-50 (Good News Translation)

The Philistines gathered for battle in Socoh, a town in Judah; they camped at a place called Ephes Dammim, between Socoh and Azekah. Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in Elah Valley, where they got ready to fight the Philistines. The Philistines lined up on one hill and the Israelites on another, with a valley between them.

A man named Goliath, from the city of Gath, came out from the Philistine camp to challenge the Israelites. He was over nine feet tall and wore bronze armor that weighed about 125 pounds and a bronze helmet. His legs were also protected by bronze armor, and he carried a bronze javelin slung over his shoulder. His spear was as thick as the bar on a weaver's loom, and its iron head weighed about fifteen pounds. A soldier walked in front of him carrying his shield. Goliath stood and shouted at the Israelites, "What are you doing there, lined up for battle? I am a Philistine, you slaves of Saul! Choose one of your men to fight me. If he wins and kills me, we will be your slaves; but if I win and kill him, you will be our slaves. Here and now, I challenge the Israelite army. I dare you to pick someone to fight me!"

When Saul and his men heard this, they were terrified.

David was the son of Jesse, who was an Ephrathite from Bethlehem in Judah. Jesse had eight sons, and at the time Saul was king, he was already a very old man. His three oldest sons had gone with Saul to war. The oldest was Eliab, the next was Abinadab, and the third was Shammah. David was the youngest son, and while the three oldest brothers stayed with Saul, David would go back to Bethlehem from time to time, to take care of his father's sheep.

Goliath challenged the Israelites every morning and evening for forty days.

One day Jesse said to David, "Take a half-bushel of this roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread, and hurry with them to your brothers in the camp. And take these ten cheeses to the commanding officer. Find out how your brothers are getting along and

bring back something to show that you saw them and that they are well. King Saul, your brothers, and all the other Israelites are in Elah Valley fighting the Philistines."

David got up early the next morning, left someone else in charge of the sheep, took the food, and went as Jesse had told him to. He arrived at the camp just as the Israelites were going out to their battle line, shouting the war cry.

The Philistine and the Israelite armies took positions for battle, facing each other.

David left the food with the officer in charge of the supplies, ran to the battle line, went to his brothers, and asked how they were getting along. As he was talking with them, Goliath came forward and challenged the Israelites as he had done before. And David heard him. When the Israelites saw Goliath, they ran away in terror. "Look at him!" they said to each other. "Listen to his challenge! King Saul has promised to give a big reward to the man who kills him; the king will also give him his daughter to marry and will not require his father's family to pay taxes."

David asked the men who were near him, "What will the man get who kills this Philistine and frees Israel from this disgrace? After all, who is this heathen Philistine to defy the army of the living God?" They told him what would be done for the man who killed Goliath.

Eliab, David's oldest brother, heard David talking to the men. He became angry with David and said, "What are you doing here? Who is taking care of those sheep of yours out there in the wilderness? You, smart aleck, you! You just came to watch the fighting!"

"Now what have I done?" David asked. "Can't I even ask a question?" He turned to another man and asked him the same question, and every time he asked, he got the same answer.

Some men heard what David had said, and they told Saul, who sent for him. David said to Saul, "Your Majesty, no one should be afraid of this Philistine! I will go and fight him."

"No," answered Saul. "How could you fight him? You're just a boy, and he has been a soldier all his life!"

"Your Majesty," David said, "I take care of my father's sheep. Any time a lion or a bear carries off a lamb, I go after it, attack it, and rescue the lamb. And if the lion or bear turns on me, I grab it by the throat and beat it to death. I have killed lions and bears, and I will

do the same to this heathen Philistine, who has defied the army of the living God. The Lord has saved me from lions and bears; he will save me from this Philistine."

"All right," Saul answered. "Go, and the Lord be with you." He gave his own armor to David for him to wear: a bronze helmet, which he put on David's head, and a coat of armor. David strapped Saul's sword over the armor and tried to walk, but he couldn't, because he wasn't used to wearing them. "I can't fight with all this," he said to Saul. "I'm not used to it." So he took it all off. He took his shepherd's stick and then picked up five smooth stones from the stream and put them in his bag. With his sling ready, he went out to meet Goliath.

The Philistine started walking toward David, with his shield bearer walking in front of him. He kept coming closer, and when he got a good look at David, he was filled with scorn for him because he was just a nice, good-looking boy.

He said to David, "What's that stick for? Do you think I'm a dog?" And he called down curses from his god on David. "Come on," he challenged David, "and I will give your body to the birds and animals to eat."

David answered, "You are coming against me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the Israelite armies, which you have defied. This very day the Lord will put you in my power; I will defeat you and cut off your head. And I will give the bodies of the Philistine soldiers to the birds and animals to eat. Then the whole world will know that Israel has a God, and everyone here will see that the Lord does not need swords or spears to save his people. He is victorious in battle, and he will put all of you in our power."

Goliath started walking toward David again, and David ran quickly toward the Philistine battle line to fight him.

He reached into his bag and took out a stone, which he slung at Goliath. It hit him on the forehead and broke his skull, and Goliath fell face downward on the ground.

And so, without a sword, David defeated and killed Goliath with a sling and a stone!

We've all probably heard this story — the story of David and Goliath. More than likely, it's one we've known since Sunday School! What if someone who has never heard this story before asked you what it's all about? How would you answer? Probably something like this:

David kills Goliath. A humble shepherd outwits and conquers a mighty warrior! A boy, a young person, does what no adult is able to do.

To do! That's how we tell the story. This is about what David did.

That's important. This story has been told and retold for centuries to show David's greatness. God is with him, and so he is able to do great things. **Do!**

For me, though, that's not the highlight of the story.

It comes from a part of the world that knew war. It comes from a part of the world that still knows war. And as we know, history and war stories are told from the point of view of the victor. We won! However, there is always more to the story. And nobody really wins. There is pain. There is loss. There is sorrow. Now (and perhaps always) more and more voices are speaking up for a new vision, one without slaughter, colonization, or war.

However, as we pray for peace, and that Thy kingdom come, God of love, we look through the eyes of this storyteller and see a boy who did a great thing. And as King in the Israelite Golden Age, he would continue to do great things.

But, as I said, I read more. I hear more. And it happens in this story 10 verses before the smooth stone from David's sling fells Goliath. It's not about what David did, but about who David was.

Let me say that I realize I'm preaching to the choir. You know that expression! The choir is at the Sunday service every week, even if no one else is! They've heard it all, they know this stuff. And you know this stuff! Wall Street United feeds hundreds of people every year. Friday breakfast each week. Sunday suppers once a month (including today!). And so much more. It's an awesome part of our

ministry. It is a blessing to many, and we are blessed in this humble service. It's what we do. It is good.

But it's not really what our story is about. We serve because of *who we are*. Not brilliant superstars and geniuses who do everything perfectly, *but God's beloved*. God's grace and love, our faith, is what motivates us.

And so it is with David. He shows up at the battlefield making a lunch run. He discovers that his brothers, the army, and even the king are afraid. So, David says, "I'll do it." People tell him all the reasons why he can't do it. David responds with the one reason why he knows he can: God is with him. The king finally agrees, but tells David he needs to wear armour, and lends the boy his own armour... the very best.

Imagine for a moment: the heavy leg armour, the arm protection, the large breastplate, the helmet, and finally a really big sword. Got the picture? (Anyone who has been a Canadian kid with parents who have dressed them for playing in the snow can imagine David right now!)

But David takes off the armour. He doesn't need it. He says, *I am me*. I am a child of God. *I am*.

You may never have had a king lend you his armour, but we live in a world, externally and sometimes internally, that tells us, "This is what you need to do in order to be somebody. This is what you need to have in order to be somebody. This is what you need to look like, or act like, in order to be somebody."

David says *no*. We say "**No!** *I am a child of God. And with God, I am enough. In fact, I am awesome!*" Not because of anything we did, but *because we are*.

I think that's the really important part of David's story.

Remember the story of Moses meeting God? It's in Exodus chapter 3. After a life of privilege, Moses has fled Egypt. He has begun to understand himself in a new way ... who he really is. And he meets God, a voice coming from a burning bush, who tells him he must go back to Egypt and free the slaves. Moses'

people! Moses knows that no one will believe him, so he asks for authority: "*Who shall I say sent me?*" And God's answer? " **I am.**" "*I am who I am.*" Or, "*I will be who I will be.*"

It's a verb —*to be*. Not a being, but being itself. **I am.**

Paralleling this story are the 7 "*I am*" statements of Jesus found in John's gospel. Jesus said, "*I am the bread of life, the light of the world, the door of the sheep, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way the truth the life, and the true vine.*"

I am.

David is not defined by his courage, his actions or his aim. It is his faith. It is about knowing who he is. It is about *being* who he is —God's beloved!

And ***you*** are! You are love, forgiveness, hope, peace, justice. You are awesome. Be!