

"FACING YOUR GIANT"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
June 19, 1994

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INTRODUCTION

One spring day years ago a tornado touched down in West Texas near the home of four year old, Paul. Today, as a grown man, he still remembers how at the first hint of trouble his father hustled all of the children inside, laid them and their mother on the floor together and covered them with a mattress. His father said that they would all be safe there. But as they waited out this tornado, Paul realized that his father had not gotten under that mattress with them. And he peaked out to discover that his father was standing at the window, watching the funnel cloud twist and turn across the West Texas prairie.

When four year old Paul saw his father by the window, he knew where he wanted to be. And so he struggled out of his mother's arms...crawled out from under the mattress, and then ran to the window and wrapped his arms around his father's leg. Recalling that day, that moment years later, he said,

"Something told me that the safest place to stand in a storm was next to my father..."

It sounds like there's a sermon there...in that line...something about trusting our Heavenly Father in time of a storm.

DEVELOPMENT

Today is Father's Day, a day when we pause to honor our earthly fathers for those special times when they have made us feel safe and loved, wanted and appreciated. But unfortunately, not every father engenders a feeling of safety and appreciation in his children, which makes us appreciated even more those who do.

Father's Day is a good time to turn to the story of David and Goliath. After all, it's got a lot of those things in it that fathers are traditionally supposed to like, things like competition, and violence and heroism. These may not be the most popular qualities right now, but they nevertheless still make for a good story and provide us with something to think about.

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"Today I defy the ranks of Israel. Give me a man, that we may fight together..."

You see that back in those days when war was about to break out between nations it was customary for two individuals to duel first in a fight to the death. And this battle would undoubtedly set the tone for the entire conflict, the entire war.

King Saul and the Israeli army heard Goliath's challenge, but no one wanted to take on this giant monster "one-on-one". Visualize, if you can, a man who is a combination of Shaquille O'Neil and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Now, make him three feet taller. Cover him from head to foot in sheet metal. Now you can see why no one wanted to take on this challenge. When the soldiers of Israel heard the challenge of Goliath, "They were dismayed and greatly afraid". Nobody wanted to fight him, to go up against him. And poor King Saul was beside himself. Who could he get to come out and fight Goliath?

Now, visualize Macaulay Culkin, the star of the Home Alone movies. Now perhaps this is a slight exaggeration, but the contrast is important. This small little fellow named David was the only Israelit who showed any interest in facing this seven foot plus giant.

King Saul, I'm sure, appreciated the gesture of David, but he tried to reason with him. After all, besides being a giant, Goliath was a professional soldier. He had all sorts of combat experience. Saul said to David, "You're just a boy...and he has been a warrior from his youth." Thank you, David.... but really, no thanks. But David was determined and he was confident. He was confident because he believed that God was on his side. So like any good job applicant, David quickly listed his qualifications for King Saul. Whenever a lion or a bear posed a danger to his father's sheep, David would come flying to the rescue. David would say...

"I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, kill it".

For David, fighting Goliath was no different from fighting a bear or a lion. And since he had done so many times before and won - he believed he could do so again. 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."

You see, David had something to teach Saul and his army. He called on the name of the Lord, something no one else in camp had apparently thought to do!

GOD WOULD GO WITH HIM INTO BATTLE

David would not go into battle alone,
because God would be with him.

It's a bit like a certain father who listened to his son tell him about his first serious conflict. Three bullies had picked on him...punched him... knocked him off his bike as he was riding home. These bullies had made life difficult for the boy, and he told his father that they were threatening to do more harm the next day. The boy was upset, disturbed...not knowing what to do.

That evening the father taught his son some basic techniques on how to defend himself. Together they explored all the possibilities, including the possibility that he might try to win them over as friends. The father worked hard to build up the boy's self-confidence. The next morning the father and son even had a prayer together at the table. And with a reassuring embrace and a handshake, the father smiled confidently and said,

"You can do it, son....I know you'll make out OK."

With that assurance the boy got on his bike and rode off to school. What the son did not know was that his father followed him in the car that day. He stayed just far enough behind to remain out of sight, but close enough to come to his son's assistance if needed. If there was trouble, the father would be there. The son might have thought he was all alone, but his father was behind him all the way. Knowing that God is with us...all the way...like that father was with his boy, is indeed a great comfort! People are able to face all sorts of giants when they know that God is with them!

Finally King Saul reluctantly agreed to let David go out and fight Goliath. No one else volunteered and besides, David was so determined that it was almost frightening. The next scene, you'll recall, is somewhat comical. David gets all suited up in Saul's armor for the battle. A bronze helmet...much too large, was placed on his head. Next he is enclosed in a protective coat of mail which is several sizes too big and it weighs him down heavily. Then Saul's sword is strapped over the suit of armor...the very weight of the sword almost brings David down. He is now encumbered by all this armor that he can't even move. He complains to Saul,

"I cannot walk with these....for I am not used to them".

To say he was uncomfortable would be a gross understatement. Anyway, David takes off the armor and gets back into his own comfortable shepherd's garb. He doesn't even take a sword or spear, but instead he goes over to the stream and chooses five smooth stones. His only weapon a sling shot. It was all he needed. And despite his apparent lack of readiness - no armor, no sword, no spear...only a peasant's weapon...David is ready for his confrontation with the giant, Goliath. He goes forth believing that God is on his side.

HIS FAITH WAS THE KEY TO IT

Put this down now as the second point that David's faith was the key to it...it was his faith in God that gave him the confidence he needed to do battle.

Recent survey suggest that many people today have difficulty making the connection between their personal faith and their everyday lives. We need to see that faith in God gives us confidence to battle whatever giants come our way. Our faith makes a difference in how we face difficulty.

One morning Phyllis saw a four foot bull snake slither across her kitchen floor. It continued on into her living room and took up residence under a table there. Phyllis offered up a quick "flash" prayer...

"God...dear God...help me. With my husband at work and no close neighbors...who can help me? Don't let this snake go into the other rooms with all their hiding places...."

In those moments, moments of panic and terror, Phyllis remembered a verse from her Bible. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". She said it over several times...while she found a paper bag. She knew what she was about to do was risky, but she didn't have any choice. She carefully placed the paper bag in front of the reptile's rapidly flickering tongue. Then she touched the snake's tail with an old cane. The snake immediately went inside the bag. She then grabbed the top of the bag, raced outside with her unwelcome guest, dumped it, and dashed back inside before her shaking knees could give way. She said,

"How thankful I was. Instead of sending someone to help me, the Lord answered my prayer by showing me that, in spite of my fear, in Christ's strength I could handle the problem at hand...."

Phyllis had tackled her own kind of giant "through the Lord". She let her faith give her that extra ounce of confidence. Kept her cool and faced the situation.

So little David went out to face Goliath wearing only his shepherd's clothing and carrying only a sling shot. What a contrast! Goliath must have resembled a Sherman tank and probably weighed almost as much as one. His armor weighed 125 pounds. Every part of him was covered with bronze, including his legs. He carried a bronze spear with the head alone weighing 15 pounds. He must have been an awesome sight to behold.

And when Goliath saw David approaching he must have roared. David went forth carrying only a shepherd's staff and his slingshot. Full of himself and overly confident, Goliath mockingly said, "Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks?" Then Goliath cursed David and told him that he would take care of him with very little effort. David responded saying,

"You come to me with sword and spear and shield, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied."

I think David knew that more was at stake here than a fight to the finish between himself and Goliath - man against man. What was really at stake here was a battle between the one "true" God and the false Gods of the Philistines. Why, he...

EMPHASIS IS ON THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

We need to note the significance of this. The emphasis here is not on the "heroic" of David, but on the faithfulness of God. If David were here this morning, he would be the first to tell us that it was God who gave him the victory. Shades of Hubert Davis and others who give God credit for victory first in a well fought contest. I like it when I see it. Derrick Harper, Charles Smith, John Starks..

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"All through those four years I held your example in mind. I looked for possibilities and wondered how you always managed to be so positive all the time.

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"Five years ago I met Jesus and figured you out".

CLOSING

This story of David and Goliath is not a lesson in the power of positive thinking, but rather it is a story of a God who whispers to us that "YES" - we can do it. And that He will be with us and that with His help, we shall prevail. We shall overcome. I believe it. Some of you believe it, too. I invite all of you to believe it. And may the same God who went into battle with David be with you always in your battles...whether those battles be physical or financial or social or mental. Whatever they may be. Trust in Him. Believe. He will give you victory.

PRAYER

Make us sensitive to Your nearness...to Your presence in the quiet moments that come at the end of this service of worship. Let the example of David facing the giant, Goliath, stir us as we do battle with giants in our lives. We know that you go with us, Lord, as we go into battle. That faith is so often the "key" to victory and that you remain faithful at all times. In the name and spirit of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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BROWNE L. KOOKEN
BRENDA A. KOOKEN
301-868-9524
9417 FAIRHAVEN AVE
UPPER MARLBORO, MARYLAND 20772

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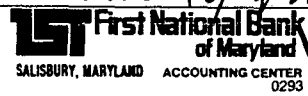
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He even engaged in what we might call today a bit of "trash Talk"....believe it or not, saying: "This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand, and I will smite thee and take thine head from thee...and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the earth and to the wild beasts of the earth"...all this before pulling back on his slingshot in the face of Goliath! Trash talk.. a long history...

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