

Mark 4:35-41
1 Samuel 17:32-49

First Presbyterian Church of Delanco, NJ
Sunday, June 21, 2009, 12th Sun. Ord.
Time, Father's Day

Facing Our Giants

How many of us have ever faced a giant? Giants can come in different forms. They can be people who are very tall, like NBA players but with maybe a little more weight. Giants can look like us but have more power in areas of business or politics. Or giants can be things we consider to be obstacles or roadblocks in our daily lives such as unemployment; not enough food, clothing, or shelter; bills to pay; marital or other family problems; addictions; and the list goes on. We look for weapons to battle these giants just as we read the Israelites do when they fight the Philistines. Enter David, the shepherd boy.

Today's Old Testament passage begins with David's decision to volunteer to fight the Philistine giant, Goliath. Goliath measures 6'9" tall according to vs. 4. He would barely be considered tall enough for the NBA. But to those of us who are vertically challenged, he is huge! Saul argues that David is no match for the giant despite his abilities. When we look closer, David's answer actually concerns the basic justice of Yahweh, Israel's God. David is supported and encouraged in times of crisis and challenge because Yahweh is opposed to those who prevent human happiness and well-being. David's speech shapes our memory of David as the shepherd-king. His flock represents Israel and people in general. Our God of justice is committed to preserving faithful people and to defending those who are

unable to defend themselves. David is anointed by Yahweh and will bring about Yahweh's will with regard to justice and equality.

King Saul tries to discourage David by contrasting David's being young with Goliath's being a professional fighter. David deals with this by explaining how he has killed both lions and bears while protecting his father's sheep. We see clues to David's confidence in his description of protecting sheep. David is certain the Philistine will meet the same fate as the lions and bears. His confidence comes from the knowledge of God being with him during the battle. It seems David's passionate speech to King Saul stirs memories in Saul of himself at another time. We all have memories of times when we were more in fellowship with God which can sometimes haunt us if that fellowship has changed.

Saul gives David permission to represent Israel and meet the giant by saying "Go and may the Lord be with you." After blessing David, the king offers David his own armor for protection. Since usually only the king and his son have full battle dress, this is a very generous offer. After David puts on the armor, he finds it difficult because the armor is much too large and too heavy for him. He can hardly move with it on. David has no experience with these weapons. He wisely refuses them. He is so uncomfortable in the armor, he sloughs it off, which emphasizes his vulnerability.

This is not just a story about a young shepherd fighting a giant warrior. It is a story about Yahweh and Yahweh's moral commitments. We know Goliath will be defeated, not because David is stronger or cleverer. He will

be defeated because Yahweh is stronger and cleverer than either David or Goliath.

As we come closer to the climatic event on the battlefield, the giant challenges both David and Yahweh. The giant mocks the human vulnerability of young David. His boyishness angers the giant. We see that Goliath is a predator and that David, as God's agent of justice, deals with the giant in that way. David's reply to Goliath goes right to the heart of the matter, because it is not David, but Yahweh, who decides the outcome. These verses bring together the several themes which have been woven into this text. David, as Israel's new shepherd, will fight the giant. But in reality, the God who has chosen David and who loves justice will strike down the Philistine warrior. The worthless gods of the Philistines are now understood to be delusions when compared to the living presence of Yahweh. This is a reality no one can deny.

All that is left now is for the battle to take place. The language is short and to the point because the fight itself needs little elaboration. There is no struggle, no question about the outcome. The battle is decided before it begins. The shepherd slays the giant with a direct hit to the forehead by one small, smooth stone. The death of Goliath signals that Israel's new king, this shepherd like no other, will defend his people against their oppressors. More than that, it affirms the God of Israel will never allow injustice to win.

Saul's effort to help David has been copied by many since then. It often seems that people try to convince others to fight their battles instead of fighting the battles themselves. Through the years, Christians are moved by

this wisdom of David refusing to use King Saul's armor. We want to remember to have confidence in our own gifts, our own experience, and abilities if we are to face the giants in our lives. David goes to fight the giant the way he fights as a shepherd, with his staff, his shepherd's bag, and his sling. He adds five smooth stones to his arsenal as he chooses them from the bed of a stream while walking toward the giant. His hidden weapon, though, is the confidence he has, knowing God is going to deliver the Philistine into his hands. It is this weapon which keeps him from being frightened and gives him a holy boldness.

Goliath's cursing and mockery have no effect on David. The giant's size and threats are unable to make even the slightest dent in David's intentions. David's speech is more of an announcement. He points out first that their armor is different, David's armor being the name of the Lord of Hosts; second that God will deliver the giant to him, and Goliath's threats will happen to all the Philistines; and last, that in the end, everyone will know there is a God in Israel and the battle is God's. David's sling and one stone are in motion before Goliath can finish laughing. The blow of that small stone makes the giant fall unconscious. David severs his head using the giant's own sword. The shepherd boy slays the giant warrior with the help of his God and with the everyday tools of his trade.

We may wonder what tools of our trade do we use in facing our giants. God is not suggesting we throw a computer at our employers or co-workers, or attack someone with guns or knives, or do anything quite so violent. God wants us to develop lifestyles in which we put our faith, trust, and confidence in Him as David does. God wants us as Christians to use the

tools of Christians in facing our giants. God wants us to love Him, obey Him, read our Bibles, pray, worship and glorify God in church, and develop an even closer relationship with Him. God will then empower us to overcome our obstacles and will help us find a way to eventually conquer our giants. It is not easy to do; but, as with David, we know, God is on our side.

We all face giants such as financial problems, various temptations, and what may be selfish desires. At one time or another, God calls us to leave our comfort zones and to move forward in our faith journeys. I was called to move from the area in which I had lived most of my life to live here in Delanco and to serve God in this church. I trusted in God as I answered the call and made the move. Once I acted on my trust and confidence in the Lord, I knew I had made the right decision. My trust in God continues to bring me great joy and happiness in my service to God in this church.

May we each face our giants, trust in God to guide us, and serve and obey God with love and enjoy happiness in God's presence all our days. Amen.