

Sermon (6/24/18, I Samuel 17: 32-49):

The story of David facing off with the mighty Goliath is one that is deeply embedded in our shared psyche. Even for those who know little about the Bible, they know this story. Perhaps, it's due to our shared hope that somewhere in the fabric of life's complicated pattern there are at least a few strands that favor the underdog, the Davids, the ones who, by all accounts, stand little chance against the great giants that seek our demise.

Few of us are not intrigued by stories of the underdog rising from the rubble to take down the powers that oppress us. Few of us don't harbor a secret hope that David's victory might someday be repeated in those places where we feel small and vulnerable.

Several years ago, we took a guided tour of Lake Placid's Sports facilities which hosted the 1932 and 1980 Winter Olympics. Our guide was a man who lived near Lake Placid and who had been a volunteer during the 1980 Olympics.

At one point, our guide led us to a section of seats in a large ice-skating facility where a television and video player were set up. He set the scene for us as we looked out over the sparkling surface of the ice rink. The American Hockey Team was facing the Russian team. In almost every way the American Team was the underdog. The Russian team was bigger, better trained, more physically prepared for the contest. They were the Goliath...the giant juggernaut that, by all appearances, seemed unbeatable.

The American team, on the other hand, was filled with inexperienced, wet behind the ears, collegiate players who were not expected to make it beyond the initial competitions.

With that introduction, our guide pushed the play button and, right there in the arena where it took place, we watched the final minutes of the 1980s Olympics' match-up between the Russian and American Hockey teams.

Every seat in the arena was filled. The score was 3 to 3. No one ever guessed the American team would get this far. As the entire arena held its breath, a player on the American team scored the winning goal. The arena let loose with a celebratory cheer that was deafening, to say the least. As

we watched, we could not help but to feel the thrill of the moment even though we were separated from it by so many years. I looked over at our guide and he was grinning from ear to ear. Pride, like that of a Grandfather showing off pictures of his grand-children, was written all over his face. To be sure, he had watched this scene more times than he could probably count, but it never grew old. This golden moment continued to feel like the thrill of a David type victory.

Children seem to latch onto the story of David and Goliath most passionately. It's understandable given that they live in a world filled with giants. Theirs is a world of intense feelings of vulnerability and smallness among so many forces against which they are readily mismatched.

The story of David and Goliath triggers hope that the immovable forces of injustice that they face will find their hope in a God who is mighty. A God who takes notice of the vulnerable, who cares for the oppressed, who will not let injustice have its way. A God who remembers the easily forgotten and responds in ways that somehow miraculously transforms the overwhelmed into the overwhelming.

This is not just a story for children, however, but a story for all of us. For all of us who sometimes feel like a small voice taking on city hall and, I must say, this has been a literal example for me these days, given the struggles we have faced with our town over the selling of the two houses the church has long owned!

For many of us, there are so many times when we can't help but to feel like David-small, outnumbered, outclassed, outpowered, cornered, and so very vulnerable. The defeats pile up. Our efforts to rise up are only followed by another knock down. Our trying often feels so tiny, so insignificant, so futile when compared to the odds we're up against.

Suicide rates among middle aged adults is, frighteningly, on the rise. Medical prescriptions for depression and anxiety are increasing at an alarming rate. The armaments with which nations threaten other nations have become so unimaginatively deadly that even the slightest error in judgement could result in overwhelming destruction. Our environment is teetering on the edge of massive failure, threatening us with catastrophic results. The governmental structures we set up to balance the scales of

fairness and justice seem so vulnerable to corruption, greed, and self-serving embellishment. There's a reason, I think, that the percentage of those who vote continues to decline! Cynicism among us has spread like an epidemic.

Who are we – so small, so easily ignored? Who are we as a church-pushed to the fringes, lacking resources, representing an ever-decreasing portion of the population, and, often times, our own worst enemy as we tout messages that seem little different than the party lines that bombard us day in and day out. Who are we?

Well, says this text, we are David...we are the underdog and the one thing that stands in our way of defeating the Goliaths we face is our lack of imagination.

There are two powerful dynamics pushing against each other in this story as David steps forward to take on Goliath.

As Israel's army, led by Saul, stands on one side and the well-equipped, well trained Philistine army stands on the other, separated only by a dried-up riverbed and a chasm of fear, the situation appears hopeless.

The swords of the Philistine army glisten in the sunlight. The ill-equipped army of Saul cowers behind rocks, relying on family and friends to bring them the bare necessities of food and water.

Out comes Goliath – a giant measuring over nine feet tall, according to the text. He twirls a huge spear like a baton – its barrel the size of a baseball bat and its sharp head weighing over 15 pounds. For forty days Goliath taunts Saul and his army, daring one of them to do battle with him. The winner would claim the opposition as their slaves. No soldier among the ranks of Saul's army would take the bait, even as Saul promised every reward he could muster.

Saul and every person in his army were frozen in fear. Their imaginations were narrow and limited, seeing only the glitter of Philistine swords, hearing only the thunderous threats of Goliath, perceiving only power and strength far more significant than anything they could muster. The smallness of their mind's eye saw only disaster. Their hearts, so far distant from the God who made them, saw only hopelessness.

Not long before this story, Samuel had anointed David to be King

Saul's replacement. At the time, every other son of Jesse's failed the test even though they all had the physical prowess that us mortals look for when choosing our leaders. Today is no different than then. Samuel was as surprised as anyone when God rejected one after the other. Finally, the youngest, the least likely, the runt of the litter, was called in from the field. Immediately, God whispered in Samuel's ear that this is the one. Why? Because, we're told, that David had a heart for God. David had a God saturated imagination not unlike Jesus' Mother who believed an angel's promise that with God nothing is impossible. In today's story we see what a God saturated imagination can accomplish.

David comes forward wondering what the problem is with Saul and his army. David is utterly confused by their frozen-in-place fear. For David, the situation is obvious. For David, the odds are entirely tilted in the favor of Saul and his army. According to David's God-saturated-imagination, the Philistines' threats are laughable. Their fighting prowess is insanely exaggerated.

David volunteers to take on Goliath. Eliab, David's older brother who, unlike David, was a soldier in Saul's army, burns with anger, convinced that his little brother is an absolute fool. Saul dresses David up in a soldier's armament because his narrow imagination envisions that only one who looks like a soldier can beat a soldier. David shucks off both Saul's armament and his brother's insults.

With a mere stone and sling-shot the mighty Goliath is felled. David prevails. Even more importantly, David's God saturated imagination proves to be a more reliable view of reality than Saul and his army were ever able to perceive.

It's a story that causes us to wonder if it's not our smallness of stature and position that gets in the way of us being the 'Davids' of today but the smallness of our imaginations. What would happen if our hearts, like David's heart, were so possessed by God that it became the reality by which we lived?

Could it be that the real problem behind the immigration crisis, is the lack of a God saturated imagination?

Could it be that the real problem behind our environmental crisis, is

the lack of a God saturated imagination?

Could it be that the real problem behind the ineffectual smallness that infiltrates the mindset of our churches these days, is the lack of a God saturated imagination?

Could it be that the real problem behind our seemingly ongoing inability to get at the root of homelessness, poverty, hunger, and the mindless tossing aside of human lives, is the lack of a God saturated imagination?

Could it be that the seemingly intractable conflicts in the Middle East, is a result of lacking a God saturated imagination?

Could it be that the forces that seem to be fracturing our sense of community as we line up to do battle with one another, is the result of lacking a God saturated imagination?

Could it be that the greed, the meanness, the fear induced nastiness that seems to define our days, is the result of lacking a God saturated imagination?

Could it be that our hyper sense of dread, hopelessness, anxiety, and depression, is being fueled by our lack of a God saturated imagination?

The story of David prevailing over the mighty Goliath is one that has long fueled our hopes with the dream that we too might someday prevail over our Goliaths. Perhaps that dream is more attainable than we think. In fact, perhaps the only thing that is getting in our way is a lack of a God saturated imagination.

To God alone be all the glory! Amen.

## Congregational Prayers and Lord's Prayer:

Leader: The Lord be with you.

*People: And also with you.*

Leader: Let us pray...

Almighty God, you know what it's like to feel small and vulnerable-surrounded by intimidating giants. You felt it in a manger in Bethlehem. You felt it when they came after you with clubs and torches in a garden in Gethsemane. You felt it when you faced the powerful in Pilate and Herod. You understand what it's like when fear turns our insides upside down, when anxiety causes our hearts to beat wildly, and when dread weakens our legs to the point where they can hardly hold us up. Yet, somehow, even when you felt these things, you did not back down. You stayed the course, seeing and knowing a reality that even your closest followers could not see. A reality of hope's victory that only a heart possessed by God can perceive.

Only you know, O God, how many times we have prayed and longed for a David type victory over all that demeans, devalues, bullies, and oppresses our lives and the lives of others. Only you know how deep our yearning is to be a kind of David that is so convinced of your determination to set the wrong right that it makes us equally determined to face even life's greatest foes.

We pray this day, O God, that your Spirit might be unleashed among us in such a way that our hearts cannot resist being possessed by you. We pray for God saturated imaginations unhindered by the limitations of mortal sight and sound. We pray for dreams that call us to enact holy solutions able to transform even our most intractable problems into problems that are felled with a single smooth stone.

We pray especially this day, O God, for all those in positions of power and leadership. Remind them of their special calling to be agents of your grace and champions of fair and equitable solutions.

We pray especially for those who are caught in places that seem inescapable and dire. For those who are ill and dying; for those who are crushed by the downward spiral of poverty, violence, and abuse; for

those whose lives are paralyzed by fear, anxiety, worry, and distress; for those who feel trapped by forces beyond their control.

We especially hold before you this morning these prayers we now pray in silence or aloud...

We ask this in Jesus' name who taught us to pray...

***All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.***

***Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.***