

“I’ve got plenty of nothing ... but I’ve got my Lord.”

According to an ancient Indian fable, a mouse was in constant distress because of its fear of the cat. A magician took pity on the mouse and turned the mouse into a cat. But then the cat became afraid of the dog. So the magician turned the cat into a panther; whereupon it was full of fear for the hunter. At this point, the magician gave up. He turned the panther back into a mouse again saying: *Nothing I do for you is going to be of any help because you have the heart of a mouse.*

If there is any one Bible story we remember from childhood, it is the story of little David fighting against big Goliath. Our love for the David and Goliath story is remembered from childhood because, as children, we often were vulnerable, afraid, and picked on by older children, particularly older siblings. Everyone has a story about a “big bully.” And so we love this lesson from I Samuel ... we love how young David, the small shepherd boy, goes out to meet the mighty Goliath while all of Israel shakes in their boots.

Through the Israelites are finally in the Promised Land, they are far from secure with these Philistines constantly threatening them. The whole nation of Israel sees itself in the little shepherd boy David. David represents the small ... the powerless ... the dispossessed ... the losers. And yet, he stands toe to toe against those in this world who represent the giants ... the powerful ... the winners. A modern day David-image might be James J. Braddock, who went from the bread lines of the Great Depression to become the heavy weight champion of the world. Known as the “Cinderella Man,” Braddock defeated Max Bauer on June 13, 1935. He beat the 10 to 1 odds against him because of his courage and his heart. Many Americans who had lost hope during the Depression placed their hope in Braddock’s victory ... a victory that renewed their hope and confidence.

If you don’t like boxing illustration, there is the story “Rudy” ... a story about a young small man who dreamed of playing football for Notre Dame and sacrificed everything for that one play in the last game of his Senior year ... carried off the field by his team mates with the whole student body chanting his name! There is the story “Million Dollar Baby” and the story of “Radio.” Just this year an autistic child finally got to play the last 4 minutes of a high school basketball team’s final game. He made 6 three point shots in a row and was high scorer for the night. For several weeks, he was in every Sports Network’s highlight film.

We love the David and Goliath story because it depicts the all-American spirit of triumph against the odds. It’s the story of the Normandy invasion against the mighty Nazi war machine. It’s the American hockey team beating the Russians in the 1980 Olympics! It’s the small rural community of Boyds taking on and winning against mighty Rockville Crushed Stone time and time again! Little against big! The powerless against the powerful! Not the heart of a mouse but the heart of a lion!

We have loved this story of David and Goliath since childhood, this story of little David triumphing over great, big giant Goliath. It is a story loved and nurtured by the weak against the strong ... the kid who confronts the bully on the school playground ... the lone little man standing against the great tanks in Beijing, China ... the little old ladies in the church in the Soviet Union who kept a constant vigil against great odds. In his 1978 essay, “The Power of the Powerless,” Vaclav Havel revealed the vulnerability of the communist project. Havel says “that communism depended upon massive popular acquiescence. (*In other words, not enough people were willing to say, No!*) Too many people were willing to make these innumerable, everyday gestures of consent by which a brutal system reinforced its image as an eternally ordained monolith. The monolith began to crumble with the quiet, unspectacular, grassroots withdrawal of consent. Ordinary people, little people, people in dozens of ordinary places, simply refused to participate in the communist lies. They refused to play by the rules of a silly game laid upon their back by the powerful. Havel asks from whence came this newfound courage to resist ... to say “No” to a massive, time-honored tradition of consent? The courage to resist was largely religious in origin. The courage to say “No” came from a “Yes” that transcended and dethroned the tyranny of the political. Thus the little old ladies, who kept and practiced the faith won out over the most powerful. And when the Berlin wall fell, the world was left with its mouth open in wonder!”

We love the David and Goliath story because it is one of many examples in the Old Testament of divine empowerment available by religious beliefs. There are many instances among the prophets, notably in the stories of Daniel in the den of lions, and the three Hebrew children in Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace. David and Goliath is a main OT

theme that faith in God is a strong power in the universe and the people of faith can appropriate it. A song that comes to my mind is George Gershwin's light-hearted song in *Porgy and Bess*: "I've got plenty of nothing ... but I've got my Lord." I think that song best exemplifies David, and all people who face great odds, and place their faith and trust in God first. David had "plenty of nothing" when he faced Goliath ... a slingshot and five smooth stones. But David had his Lord, and the confidence that ... that was more than enough. And it was! The emphasis of the David and Goliath story is not so much David who is going to fight, but the Lord. The message of the whole account is contained in David's words in vv 45-47: "... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's."

The "Goliaths" of today are still no challenge to the Lord. Corporate giants of crime, social oppression, disease, war, hunger, tyranny, ignorance, poverty ... or individual Goliaths of no job, no medical insurance, divorce, single parent child-rearing, lack of opportunity, financial problems, addiction, low self-esteem, meaninglessness whatever the "Goliaths" are in our life ... they can all be slain with a well-aimed stone of spiritual empowerment. It's a case of recognizing that it is not in one's own strength ... it is as David said: "The battle is the Lord's." It's a case of not having a heart of a mouse, but the faith of a David.

I know that it's a childlike, fairytale story, this story of small David and the giant, Goliath. I know that many of you are all grown up, sophisticated, wise in the way of the world. Yet no matter how grown up you are now ... no matter how in control of things you are at the present moment ... you ought to know enough to know that life is not always like that. Life has a way of belittling us all ... at some time sooner or later. What then? When it's our turn to stand before principalities and powers ... when it's our time to stand alone before the forces of injustice and oppression ... we need to remember this story. This story is not meant to be argued, explained, or picked apart. It is meant to be asserted, enjoyed, re-told by people who know what it is like to be little ... to be on the bottom. It is an engaging, simple, childlike story so that we will never forget it ... so that we can draw upon it when we need to when it's our turn to stand and deliver ... stand and confront our "Goliaths." We can face the "giant" issues in our life when we face them in the name of God who loves to make winners of losers ... loves to save and deliver those who are lost and caught. No "Goliath" in our life is a match for God.

So then, in all the days of our life, wherever we should find ourselves this beloved story of little David should teach us to sing the words of Psalm 46: *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble ... the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.* People, who live by faith and faith alone, are triumphant. God in the end always wins, because God works through the "Davids" of this world to defeat the "Goliaths" of this world. I remember reading about Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, a man of short stature, but a giant of a person when compared to most of us, spiritually speaking. Bishop Tutu was walking by a construction site on a temporary sidewalk the width of one person. A white man appeared at the other end, recognized Tutu, and said, "I don't give way to gorillas." At which Tutu stepped aside, made a sweeping gesture, and said, "Ah, yes, but I do!"

Last Sunday I concluded my sermon by asking two questions: Do we have the heart to be a Christian? Do we have the heart to be a church? The heart that I speak of is the heart of a David, a heart that has great confidence in the power of God, and little reliance on the powers of this world; ... a heart that does not play the odds or settles, but a heart that takes its courage from faith in God and resists those powers of evil bent on destroying us ... a heart full of faith that knows that courage is not the absence of despair, but rather, courage is the capacity to move ahead in spite of despair. No one is immune from facing insurmountable odds. No one goes through this life untouched by the evils, the injustices, or the unfairness of this world ... the real tragedies of life in general.

No one is immune. Your Christian faith carries no guarantee that life won't be very difficult. However, your faith in God does come with a power that can move you in a direction of triumphant living. There are plenty of examples of the living God in the world today, if you would have ears to hear and eyes to see. Therefore, never lose faith and confidence in God, but place your life at God's disposal. Nothing can defeat you ... only you can defeat yourself! When you have your Lord, all else is powerless. The power that problems or situations have over you, only come from the amount of power that you give them to lord over you. Surrender that which is bent on defeating you. Give it up! Wear the armor of confidence and trust in God. You may, at times, think you have plenty of nothing, but you always have your Lord! Amen.