

“Our Gifts Are Enough in God’s Hands”

I Samuel 16:1-13

I Samuel 17:1-50, selected verses

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Christine Chakoian

First Presbyterian Church

Lake Forest, Illinois

Commitment Sunday

We all know what it’s like to face down giants – giants that threaten to undo us, and everything we hold dear. No one is exempt. We all face down giants: giants like a marriage crumbling, or a life-long friendship that unravels before our eyes. Giants like job loss or financial ruin. Giants like cancer, or mental illness, or heart failure, or addiction. We know what it’s like to face enemy giants as a nation, as we did on 9/11. And once again we know what it’s like to face enemy giants as a world, as we grieve with those who mourn in Paris and Beirut today.

So the story of David and Goliath: it’s not just a “once upon a time” story. It’s a “here and now” story: a story of impossible odds and unlikely heroes and little things that add up in God’s hands. We’re not the first to face enemy giants, and we won’t be the last. Let’s look at what we can learn about facing down giants today.

First, and maybe most importantly, the story of David and Goliath reminds us that we don’t face our giants alone. Because we associate God’s presence, God’s blessings, with things going well, it’s almost automatic that we wonder where on earth God is when life takes a horrible turn – for us, for those we love, for our nation, for our world. “How can God let this happen?” we cry. But the first thing this story reminds us is that God notices, and God cares, and God is with us precisely when things are going south.

But the second thing we learn is this: there’s a caveat to the good news about God’s presence. God is with us – but that also means that God has access to us, and can call on us, whether or not we feel we have anything to

offer. And our estimation of the usefulness of our gifts? Well, what *we* see with our eyes may not be God's view of things at all.

Isn't this what happens to David? When God sent Samuel to anoint the next king, Samuel assumed that God's chosen one would have been Jesse's oldest son – that's just how it worked in that culture. But God doesn't judge by outward measures – by size and stature, by age and worldly esteem. I love the fact that David is chosen not because he's "huge," as Donald Trump likes to say. David is chosen because God judges not according to outside appearances, but according to our inner heart. And that's how God judges us too: choosing us not because we are "huge" in the world's eyes, but because we're valued in God's eyes.

The task facing David, however, *is* "huge": literally, in the form of a giant named Goliath. Goliath – 9 feet tall, covered in bronze armor, wielding an enormous sword, backed by the well-armed Philistine army. That's what David is facing. David is obviously ill-equipped by any outward measure. He is just a boy ... he has no experience as a warrior ... he doesn't even know what to do with King Saul's armor.

But God knows who David is ... God knows David's heart ... and God knows David isn't empty-handed. So David reaches for what's available to him: five small stones, plucked out of the stream bed. And in God's hands, that's enough.

And it makes me wonder: in the face of the giants that we face, can we imagine putting who we are and what we have in God's hands? Can we imagine offering the gifts we have that on the surface may seem ridiculously meager, but in God's hands, might be just the thing that's needed? That's

precisely the question we are asked today, on Commitment Sunday. Yes, Commitment Sunday is about pledging our tithes to the institution of the church; but it's so much more than that. Commitment Sunday is about pledging *ourselves* – all that we have, all that we are – to God's purposes. Commitment Sunday is about trusting that in God's hands, what we bring is enough ... enough, even, to face the giant.

So just like David picked up five meager stones from the river bed, it's time to look around at the resources we have – and we have many: our skill sets, our relationships, our bank accounts, our passions. And then there are the resources we have right here – commitments that our culture renders ridiculously insignificant, but in God's hands ... in God's hands, they can do great things.

When we worship ... when pick up that small stone, and choose to gather together Sunday after Sunday instead of watching the news or sleeping in, it may seem, well, so quaint. Who in the world cares whether we sing songs, or pray, or listen to the Bible read? But you and I, we've seen what difference it can make. How the voices of the choir can touch a place in our heart that had grown cold and stale, but was softened ... how a prayer for a stranger's surgery, or our own loss, or the world's heartbreak, can bind us as brothers and sisters ... how the Word proclaimed can show us a truth that feels like it was meant just for us, and we didn't even know we needed it ... how being here together, week after week, testifies to the love of God that is so much stronger than any giant the world can come up with, the giants of anger and hatred, the giants of power and greed, the giants of hopelessness and shame. God's love ... God's love is so much stronger than any earthly giant, and every time we worship, *that's* what we're testifying, to ourselves, and to the world God loves.

And when we learn ... when we pick up that small stone of seeking wisdom, it may seem like a little choice. What difference does it make whether our children learn the Bible, or our confirmation class learns how to pray? What difference does it make whether we gather in small groups to open Scripture, or go downstairs to listen to experts like Dr. Bannerman today? But you and I, we've seen what difference it can make. We've seen how, in the plethora of opinions and volume of chatter, how the truth can set us free ... how having the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other, in Karl Barth's famous words, can drive us to a faith that holds the world in front of us ... how keeping our minds open presses us to the Spirit's depth and wisdom more than our certainty ... and every time we seek to learn, that's what we're testifying, to ourselves, and to the world that seeks quick and certain and tidy answers.

And when we connect and invite ... when we pick up those small stones of fellowship and welcome, it may seem so pointless. What difference does it make to get together? What difference does it make to include others? But you and I, we've seen the power of community that's formed here ... knitting prayer shawls for the grieving, or sharing joys and concerns at women's Bible study ... we've seen the gentle reassurance of belonging, munching bagels after men's Bible study, joshing with each other at rummage sorting or in choir, eating pizza at middle school youth group. It may seem ridiculously little ... and then we discover we have friends to lean on when we need them most, and we wish the rest of the world could know this sturdy, trustworthy community. Honest to God, I don't know how people make it without a church family like this one.

And when we serve ... when we give money or time for mission, it may seem pointless in the face of the enormous giant of need, of poverty, of

joblessness, of climate change, of terrorism the likes of which just seems to be growing exponentially. What difference does it make to serve those in need, when the needs are so great? The world – it laughs in our faces for trying to do something. But we care anyway. We care because the Lord pointed to the mustard seed and said, this will grow ... it will grow and bear fruit. And we know that it does. And every time a few guys get up in the middle of the night to roll up their sleeves and make breakfast at the PADS homeless shelter ... and every time a dozen adults and children serve 100 dinners at Soup Kitchen ... and every time the mission committee meets to decide where our \$600,000 will go this year ... and every time our Senior Highs and Middle Schoolers and their advisors go on Work Trip ... and every time someone sits on the board of directors of Sarah's Circle or the Samaritan Counseling Center or Faraja School or a thousand other places ... and every time someone writes a check, or writes their congressman ... and every time we stand up and say, no, the world doesn't *have* to be this way, the world *can* be just, and kind, and fair, and peaceful ... every time we say the Prince of Peace has other things in mind for us – well, we know it matters.

There will always be giants terrorizing us ... there will always be Goliaths, laughing in our faces. But you know what? God's laughing too: God's laughing. Because in God's hands, once upon a time, so long ago, a young boy with a slingshot was enough. And in God's hands, once upon a time, a young man on a cross was enough. And in God's hands, now, *we* are enough. I'm banking on it. I'm betting my life on it.

And if you feel the same way – if you are ready to pledge yourself, and your gifts, however great or meager to God's hands – if you are ready to stand up against the giants together – then please stand – literally, stand with me,

stand with one another. And let us join in the prayer of commitment – our Call to Faithful Living:

- Leader: God of abundant gifts, you inspire us to share.
 You open our eyes to see that what you give us is enough:
 enough to be a blessing to the world.
 Now in celebration, we return a portion of your abundant gifts to us,
 and trust that they will make a difference in your hands.
 You give us the gift of worship:
- People: **As we offer our worship, inspire us to share what we have received:
 How our hearts are touched, our minds taught,
 our lives transformed—as we lift up our voices in song,
 hear your Word proclaimed, and pour out our prayers in this family of faith.**
- Leader: You give us the gift of learning:
- People: **As we learn together, inspire us to share what we have received:
 How from the time we are tiny until we are old,
 Scripture’s stories come alive for us,
 and your truth propels us to care for your beloved world.**
- Leader: You give us the gift of community:
- People: **As we connect with one another, inspire us to share what we have received:
 How Christ welcomes us just as we are, with hospitality and grace,
 and gives us one another—sharing joys and sorrows, laughter and tears,
 our deepest hopes and darkest fears.**
- Leader: You give us the gift of service:
- People: **As we serve the world you love, inspire us to share what we have received:
 How you use our giving not just to bless others, but to change us—
 opening our eyes to see the face of Christ in those we serve,
 touching our hearts with the freedom that comes with humility.**
- Leader: You give us the gift of welcoming others:
- People: **As we invite others into your home,
 inspire us to share what we have received:
 How Christ once welcomed us when we were strangers;
 how he knelt to wash our feet even when we failed him;
 how he welcomed us prodigals home when we had gone our own way;
 how he gave us this family to love us in good times and bad.**
- Leader: Each of these gifts is from your gracious hand, O God:
- People: **Receive our thanks, and transform our gifts
 to accomplish everything that you would have us do.
 Now receive these gifts, we pray, and take our very lives,
 as we dedicate ourselves to your work and to your will. Amen.**