

September 2, 2018

Scripture:

1 Samuel 17: 1-50

“The would be king.”

10 years ago Eugene Peterson published a great little book called --- “The Invitation: A Simple Guide to the Bible.”

It’s just over 200 pages and it simply goes through each book of the Bible theme by theme ---- inviting the reader to go deeper into scripture.

“The Invitation: A Simple Guide to the Bible” ---- by Eugene Peterson.

The chapter for 1 and 2 Samuel includes the following ---- a helpful introduction for us today as we make our way through 1 Samuel 17 --- the story of David --- the would be king --- and Goliath the giant.

Peterson starts by saying these 2 books --- 1 and 2 Samuel ----- center around 4 people --- Hannah --- Samuel --- Saul --- and David.

And then he goes on to say ---

“These four lives ----- Hannah --- Samuel --- Saul --- and David --- become seminal for us at the moment we realize that our ego-bound experience is too small a context in which to understand and experience what it means to believe in God and follow his ways.

For these are large lives --- and of course he’s right David is a large life.

For these are large lives ---- large because they live in the largeness of God.

Not one of them --- including David ---- our focus for today ---- not one of them can be accounted for in terms of cultural conditions or psychological dynamics --- God is the country in which they live.”

I love that last line ----- “God is the country in which they live” --- not Israel --- not Canada ---- not their own little lives and concerns but God’s life and God’s concerns --- “God is the country in which they live.”

And Peterson carries on to say ---

“Most of us need to be reminded that these stories are not exemplary in the sense that we stand back and admire them --- like statues in a gallery --- knowing all the while that we will never be able to either that gloriously or tragically ourselves.

Rather they are immersions into the actual business of what it means to be human.

Reading and praying our way through these pages ----- we get it --- gradually we recognize what it means to be a woman --- a man --- ---- has mostly to do with God.

These four stories --- again Peterson is talking about Hannah --- Samuel --- Saul and David ---- these four stories do not show us how we should live ---- -- but how I fact we do live --- authenticating the reality of our daily experience as the stuff that God uses to work out his purposes.”

There’s some great lines here -----

“Reading and praying our way through these pages ----- we get it --- gradually we recognize what it means to be a woman --- a man --- ---- has mostly to do with God.”

But there’s more --- one last bit.

Peterson writes ----- “This cluster of interlocking stories trains us in perceptions of ourselves --- our sheer and irreducible humanity --- that cannot be reduced to personal feelings --- ideas --- or s circumstances.

And then the last line ---

“If we want to live a life other than mere biology --- we must deal with God --- there is no other way.”

It’s true if we want to live a life other then mere biology ---- if we want to live a life beyond just the physical realm ----- we must deal with God --- we must interact with God ---- we must realize that what it means to be human -- as Peterson puts it ----- has mostly to do with God.

Well our passage for today --- David and Goliath --- has mostly to with God.

Like all scripture it is the self revelation of God in the passage that matters most.

As Fleming Rutledge so pointedly puts it ---- “We don’t ask questions of scripture --- it asks questions of us.”

Most of us are likely familiar --- or at least somewhat familiar with the story of David and Goliath.

If not --- if you just heard this for the first time this morning --- do yourself a favour and re-read it later again over the long week end ---- it’s a beautiful story of God revealing Himself to a struggling community on the verge of a spiritual breakthrough.

There’s tiny David ---- and there’s big huge Goliath.

And tiny David --- and big Goliath --- all 9 feet 9 inches of Goliath ---- go to battle ----- one on one --- with the entire outcome of the war between their 2 nations resting on this one lopsided battle between 2 complete opposite representatives.

One a tiny boy with no real battle experience --- the other a tested warrior --- a giant of man ---- well trained and well experienced in mortal combat.

All appearances point to Goliath annihilating David --- and of course --- this never happens because of the other character in the story ----- the main character in the story ---- God.

But before we go any deeper here --- another --- very similar story -- from 2 Kings 6.

In 2 Kings 6 ----- Elisha and his servant is all holed up in a bunker in Dothan and the King of Aram sends soldiers and surrounds them.

And in the morning Elisha’s servant looks out the window and says ---- “Oh my Lord! What shall we do.” ---- seeing that they are surrounded by the enemy on all sides.

Elisha then steps up to the window ---- looks out and sees a completely differently reality ----- instead of only seeing the enemy surrounding them --

- true as that is ----- Elisha sees something else ----- he sees all the angels surrounding the enemy soldiers.

“Don’t be afraid” ----- Elisha says ---- “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

What a great line of faith ----- “Don’t be afraid ----- those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

In a sense that is precisely what is happening here with David and Goliath.

The other Israelites ---- in fact every single other Israelite ---- sees like Elisha’s servant did --- the seemingly insurmountable enemy.

But David --- like Elisha’s sees something else.

When David looks out at Goliath he doesn’t see defeat or destruction or raw power and might and strength.

When David looks out at Goliath all he sees is a small limited worldly obstacle of fear that is holding people back from seeing the hand of God in their midst.

In 2 Kings 6 with Elisha and the army of Aram it’s --- “Don’t be afraid ----- those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

In 2 Samuel 17 it’s ----- “Don’t be afraid He who is with us --- God --- is greater than he who is with them --- Goliath.”

Elisha doesn’t see the enemy when he looks out the window at Dothan --- he sees God’s angels.

David doesn’t see a 9 foot 9 inch giant before him when he looks out into the valley ----- he sees an obstacle that God can remove with one tiny stone expertly placed.

Elisha prays to God in 2 Kings 6 ---- “Open his eyes Lord --- so that he can see.”

Hoping that his servant will take another look and see with eyes of faith the reality that God is surrounding their enemies and all will be well.

Well ---- God is doing the exact same thing here with David.

He is opening the eyes of the people --- not just the Israelites --- but all the people --- Philistines as well --- that God is at work here.

He is inviting the people to see not an obstacle but the presence and power of God in their midst.

When David walks out this is what Goliath says to him ----

“Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?”

And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

“Come here,” he said, “and I’ll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!”

David’s reply is priceless ----- claiming the sovereignty of God ----- David says -----

“You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head.

This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel.

All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.”

“It’s already over.” ----- David says.

And it’s already over not because of me ----- it’s over because of He who is working in me --- the God of Israel.

Had David had tried to do this on his own he would have been slaughtered -- - we all know that ---- it’s obvious.

To look at this battle scene from strictly human --- physical terms ---- it's already over ---- no contest.

And to look at this battle from spiritual --- eyes of faith terms --- it's exactly the same ---- already over --- no contest.

The difference is those with strictly worldly eyes see Goliath prevailing.

David unlike every other person there knows God always wins --- and today this giant is no exception.

And David ---- the would be king of Israel --- is already pointing us to the would be King of the world Jesus Christ --- who like David will face a giant of his own --- satan --- and just as shockingly for some Jesus will also defeat him.

This is a not a story about David ---- this is not a story about Goliath --- this is not a story about Israel.

This is a story that includes David.

This is story that includes Goliath.

This is a story that includes Israel and the Philistines --- but it goes way way way beyond just 2 armies and 2 nations --- it has cosmic --- permanent--- final --- and eternal implications.

As Eugene Peterson said ---- this is a story that reminds us that what it means to be human mostly has to do with God.

The story of Jesus and the Romans officials and Jewish leaders --- isn't just about a couple of countries --- a couple of Empires drawing out some lines and dealing with a perceived criminal --- a disturber of the peace ----- it has cosmic implications --- permanent ---- final and eternal implications --- it is about God.

It has implications for the whole of humanity for sure --- including each and every one of us here today for sure --- but is mostly about God and His profound love for us.

David was there --- he was on the scene --- he too looked down into the valley of Elah where the giant Goliath stood before the Israelites each day taunting them ---- every day asking one to come forward and fight him.

David was there --- and he comes bringing food.

As verse 17 begins -----

“Now Jesse said to his son David, “Take this token of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread for your brothers and hurry to their camp.

Take along these ten cheeses to the commander of their unit. See how your brothers are and bring back some assurance from them. They are with Saul and all the men of Israel in the Valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines.”

Go bring the men food --- nourishment --- encouragement --- supplies --- David is told by his father.

And David brings --- nourishment --- encouragement --- supplies --- all right.

God comes on the scene thanks to David’s simple ability to claim whose he is --- thanks to David’s ability to claim God as sovereign over all --- including the 9 foot 9 giant.

And then David’s brothers scold him --- his oldest brother Eliab says in verse 28 ----

“Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.”

There is always someone --- at least one who thinks they know better than the one God sends.

And they usually guise it in trying to be looking out for others ---- “And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness?” --- David’s older brother says scolding David.

“Who did you leave our food with --- the sheep ----- I’m just looking out for everyone.” ----- Eliab no doubt told himself as he scolded David for showing up.

Meanwhile we all know God sent this would be king ---- to save them all.

And then there is David’s response --- a little later on in verse 32 ----
 “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.”

Beautiful --- simple ----- servant heart answer.

“Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.”

After David got the lay of the land.

Everyday this giant steps out into the valley and says who will fight me --- if anyone comes to fight me and wins then their entire army wins the whole war --- but if anyone steps out to fight me and I win my army wins the entire war.

Once David realizes this is all there is to it --- once he realizes all that has to be done is kill this one single man ----- he replies with ---
 “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.”

It’s as is David says --- “What this guy --- this guy is all that is standing in the way --- no worries --- I’ll go and fight him and end this standoff.”

And David isn’t conceited like his older brother said ---- “Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is.”

David isn’t conceited --- he’s faithful --- faithful in love ---- you are sovereign over us.

David knows God is calling him to step up and shoot a little stone to end all this useless --- physical worldly bravado.

It's as if David says --- "This one --- this challenge --- this obstacle --- it's an easy one ----- here I can solve this impasse."

But before David can actually do as God is calling him --- comes some more foolish behaviour --- Saul tries to outfit David the way he would outfit himself.

Saul tries to tell David how to do things --- wear this --- do this --- don't do that ---- do it this way --- because that's how I --- Saul would do it --- prepare this way --- because that's how I Saul would prepare.

Verse 38 ---- "Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head."

Saul thought he knew how to help David --- how to equip David.

David --- seeing Saul trying to help --- went along with it for a while ----

"David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them.

"I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine."

Once David took off all the other junk other people tried to suit him in --- then and only then was he ready to go forward and fight for God.

"I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine."

And then there is the small little act that changed everything.

This is David's coming to the foot of the cross moment.

David realizing he can't do it himself ---- with this armour on and that armour ---- this is David realizing God's got this --- God is sovereign over all including this so called giant of a man.

After Goliath's little foolish rant -- "What am I a dog --- I'll feed you to the animals --- yadda yadda yadda ---- I know better than you do--- and so on."

After all the foolish talk ---- and there is always some foolish talk when God comes on to the scene ----- after all the foolish talk ---God acts.

Verse 48 -----

"As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground."

Imagine just how disappointing it must have been for the Philistines.

"As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground."

The Philistines were no doubt thinking something along the lines of ---- our giant --- this little boy --- there will be Israelite blood and guts slewn everywhere ---- it'll be a swift and brutal win --- we mustn't blink or we'll miss it.

And yet there is just a stone and a sling.

And a dead giant and a little boy.

And God.

The would be king --- David --- didn't win.

The giant Goliath --- didn't win.

God did.

David reminds us --- David points to the arrival of another would be King ---
 -- Jesus Christ ---- who will slay the biggest giant of all --- satan.

“I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty.” --- David says.

“You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty...” --- David says.

David doesn't just come --- he comes against something.

He comes against opposition --- he comes against evil.

“You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty...”

Jesus didn't just come ---- He came against evil --- sin --- hatred ---- pride ---
 envy --- greed --- self righteousness and self centeredness --- He came
 against satan --- darkness --- He had to fight the darkness.

Our walks of faith aren't just about sunshine and butterflies --- feel good
 moments of peace love and harmony --- sooner or later there is the cross ----
 and if we truly want to know Jesus Christ we will meet Him at the foot of
 the cross.

You cannot come to the beauty of Easter without also and without first
 sinking into the beauty and glory of Jesus Christ and the cross of Good
 Friday.

David had to gird up his loins and walk out into the valley --- he didn't
 defeat Goliath on a hilltop or mountain --- he prevailed in a valley ---- the
 valley of Elah ----- it's in the valley that he shot that sling and then cut off
 the head of the giant ---- securing the victory for God.

This is a valley experience.

Jesus had to hang up on that cross --- a valley experience ----- before
 walking out of the tomb.

We do a disgrace to God if we don't honour the valley experience ---- the brutal sacrifice made on our behalf and instead simply only ever running to Easter morning.

David knew the sovereignty of God and he was fearless.

Jesus knew the sovereignty of God and He was fearless.

David knew the sovereignty of God and he also knew he still had to cut off the head of the giant.

Jesus knew the sovereignty of God and he also knew He had to suffer the cross.

Dishes get dirty when we make a beautiful scrumptious meal.

There is garbage to put out at the end of the week --- our lives produce garbage.

There are weeds to pull out and uproot.

As Jesus Himself said ----- there are branches that need to be cut off --- and burned even ----- remember Jesus in John's Gospel chapter 15 ---- pruning is necessary sometimes.

The world can be a messy place sometimes --- David had to cut off a head.

Jesus had to die on the cross.

Sometimes we have to get our hands dirty in faith.

Sometimes we have to stand up to bullies.

Sometimes we have to speak up when there is injustice and foolishness in our midst.

Sometimes we have to call people for there poor behaviour and sometimes we have to be wise and humble enough to let people call us for our weak --- and foolish behaviour and not lazily dismiss it as just ---- judgment or negativity.

David had to step up and fight the giant.

Sometimes the giant obstacle between us and God is obvious and other times it isn't --- we have to be vigilant and fearless ---- and remember that God is with us all the time --- in the fire and the flood --- as our opening praise song said.

Either way when someone ---- or something stands between us and God ----- we have to remove them.

This giant Philistine in the valley of Elah was blocking the Israelites from trusting in God.

So God sent in the would be king --- David with fresh eyes and fresh faith to open their failing eyes.

David's vision of his community --- his people --- the Israelites winning --- wasn't of David winning --- David knew he couldn't possibly win on his own --- David's vision of everyone winning was through him serving.

David wasn't a warrior --- he was a shepherd --- and a porter ----- he was sent there to the valley as a porter --- carrying food --- bread and cheese.

But once he got there he realized that everyone had been unnecessarily seized with fear and doubt.

They had seen this giant step out ---- say his little peace ---- and prance around like a know it all ---- and they had become so used to it --- it had become the norm --- day in and day out it was the same thing --- come out -- - "If you beat me your nations wins --- if I beat you my nation wins." ---- you would think they would have tried to figure things out --- but clearly they didn't --- they were in the grip of fear ---- and negativity --- and they were in the grip of this routine becoming the norm.

Sometimes we have to step up and out in faith ---- without knowing where our foot is about to land.

The would be king --- small "k" ----- king --- David stepped up in faith proclaiming that God was sovereign over all including this so called giant.

Goliath was a giant by the world's standards.

But David was a giant when it came to faith and trust in God.

Jesus took on the giant that was the Roman Empire --- Jesus took on the giant was the Jewish ruling authorities --- Jesus took on the giant that was satan --- and He defeated them all.

The would be --- small "k" --- king ---- David ---- shows us the attributes of the would be capital "K" ---- King --- Jesus.

"Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him."

"You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty..."

David says -----

"I will go."

And David says ---

"I will go even to this difficult task ---- battling this huge obstacle that no one else dares to take on."

I will go --- I will fight --- I will follow --- I will claim God sovereign over all --- not just me --- but all --- including this giant in this valley.

This boy child David.

This shepherd.

This would be king.

Shows us so many of the attributes of the KING ----- it's no surprise Jesus comes from the seed of David.

We can see it --- servanthood --- faith --- trust ---- obedience ----- right in David --- Jesus' --- great --- great ----- great ---- great --- great ---

grandfather David. (27 greats according to Luke ---- 43 according to Matthew).

This would be king ----- points to the true KING.

This would be king ---- lives out what it means to claim God as sovereign over all.

If you're all consumed by fear --- or negativity --- if you're not all that happy --- I promise you --- things will never truly pick up for you until you claim Him sovereign over all.

And it's something we have to do each and every day --- claim His as sovereign over all.

It's already done.

The giant has been slayed.

Satan loses ----- sin is defeated --- God wins.

But we have to claim this anew each day ---- morning by morning new mercies I see the Bible says --- Lamentations 3 22-23.

The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for today --- shines through this would be king --- David.

Who steps up in faith and removes the obstacle that is holding his people back.

“Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.”

“He comes against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against him in the name of the Lord Almighty...”

“If we want to live a life other than mere biology --- we must deal with God --- there is no other way.”

When we claim the sovereignty of God --- God moves as only God can --- and it is a beautiful thing.

The most important commandment of them all according to our Lord is --- love the Lord your God with all your heart mind strength and soul.

This begins with claiming His sovereignty.

The little would be king --- David ---- in the valley of Elah claims the sovereignty of God --- and all is well --- the people are set free from fear and inaction ----

“He comes against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against him in the name of the Lord Almighty...”

Amen.