

“LITTLE THINGS WITH BIG MEANING: IV – A SLINGSHOT”

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I Samuel 17:19-49

Many of you know that I’m a fan of classic TV – or what they now are calling “memorable TV.” You know, shows like “I Love Lucy,” “Leave It to Beaver,” and, of course, “The Andy Griffith Show.” If you didn’t know it, all of those shows are on the very first thing in the morning – starting at 5 am.

Well, each of them has some particularly classic episodes – like when Lucy worked in the chocolate factory, got tipsy selling Vitametavegamin, and wrestled in an Italian vineyard; or when Beaver climbed up onto a billboard and fell into a giant tea cup and got stuck there. Two of my favorite episodes of Andy Griffith – one called “Opie’s Charity” and the other, the one that always makes me think of today’s scripture lesson, is an episode called “Opie the Birdman.”

In that episode, Opie is given a slingshot. He’s never used it, and he’s down in the sheriff’s office talking to his father and Barney, and his father warns him to be very careful with it and never use it indoors. Of course, Barney, being Barney,

has to show off what he thinks are his great skills at using a slingshot, and in the process, he uses it right there in the sheriff's office (indoors, where he's been warned not to use it), and he manages to break the glass on the front of a bookcase!

But that's nothing compared to what happened to Opie a little while later. He's outside just walking along shooting his slingshot at nothing in particular, and he shoots up into a tree, and accidentally kills a mother bird, leaving her babies in their nest all alone. I'm sure it never occurred to him, a little boy, just what kind of power that slingshot would yield.

A slingshot, in the scheme of things, doesn't seem very powerful, does it? I mean, not compared to weapons that have been around for centuries. And yet, in this morning's lesson from I Samuel, a slingshot is the instrument of death for a giant named Goliath. So let's go back and take a closer look at the story.

You might remember that David was the son of a man named Jesse – actually he was Jesse's youngest son – the youngest of eight sons. When David was young, like most young boys that day he was a shepherd, tending his father's herd. He was also, by all accounts, a gifted musician, playing the lyre.

At that time, when David was young, Israel was ruled by its first king, King Saul. Before Saul, there was no king. God was the ruler, but along the way, the people clamored for an earthly king, and though it was not his wish, God granted it to the people, and Saul became king.

Suffice it to say, that it did not go well. Before long, God was disappointed in the way Saul disobeyed him time and again, and he decided there needed to be a new king, so God set the prophet Samuel to the task of finding a new king. One of the places Samuel looked was in the house of Jesse – knowing that there was a houseful of young men there.

One by one, Jesse paraded his sons in front of Samuel, and one by one, he would shake his head “no.” He hadn’t found the one God wanted. When the seventh son had passed by, Samuel turned to Jesse and asked, “Is that all of them?” “Well, no,” Jesse replied. “There is one more, my youngest, but he’s just a boy, and he’s out in the fields with the sheep.”

Following God’s nudging, Samuel asked Jesse to have David brought in, which he did, and Samuel knew right away, that David was the answer to his

search. He was the one God wanted to be Israel's next king. It wouldn't happen immediately, in fact, for a while David was part of the support system for King Saul – coming to play his lyre to soothe Saul when he was upset or irritated.

Well, it came to pass that Israel went to war against the Philistines. All of Jesse's other sons were in the battle. One day, the Philistines' great warrior, a man whose huge fierceness was matched by his huge size, a man named Goliath, put out a challenge to the Israelites – that they should send their fiercest, most courageous warrior to fight him – one on one.

Young David had come to the battle ground, not to fight, but to bring provisions to his brothers - he heard Goliath's challenge and stepped up to the plate. Now imagine that! A young man standing up to this giant, fierce, imposing Goliath. The great writer Frederick Buechner described Goliath as standing “seven feet tall, twirling his twenty-five pound spear with the careless ease of a cheerleader twirling her baton.” (On-line, Frederick Buechner, Center for Excellence in Preaching)

Anybody with any sense could see that there was no way David would survive.

Well, you heard what happened in the scripture reading that Mike read. King Saul attempted to help David be armed for the battle by clothing him with a full coat of armor, a helmet for his head and more, but David discarded all of it. Instead, he took a staff, picked up five smooth stones and put his sling in his hand, and off he went to face the giant Goliath.

You can almost hear Goliath's laugh when he sees David coming. He sees this young guy coming at him relatively unarmed, and surely unprotected and he cries out, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" He continues to taunt David, and David replies with words that show his true power – how he is coming in the name of the Lord to strike down evil, that his power is from God.

And when big old Goliath came at him, thinking he would make quick work of David, young David picked out a stone, put it in his sling, let it fly, and it struck Goliath on his forehead, and down he went. It was over! The big bad enemy was gone, good had won, evil was defeated, God was victorious!

At face value, what David faced looked like a lost cause, completely overwhelming, yet armed with the right equipment – a small slingshot in one hand, and the power of God all around him – he faced the giant and won.

David's taking on a giant is a great story in the midst of many other "facing the giant" stories in the words of holy scripture. They are everywhere. Moses leading the people of God away from overwhelming enemies, finding victory as the Red Sea parted and they landed safely on the other side. Ruth and Naomi, devastated by the death of the men they loved, scared to their core about how they would survive, found new life and love through people God put in their path. And throughout the Bible, all of the people facing the giant called sickness – the man born blind, the woman with the issue of blood, the paralyzed man whose friends carried him to Jesus – found healing and new life at the hands of God.

And the biggest story of victory of all – the biggest victory over a giant ever – Jesus' resurrection from death destroying the power of Satan!

Friends, I chose this story of David and Goliath today for a reason. Because all of us are face to face with a giant these days – and the giant's name is pandemic,

coronavirus, Covid-19. Like Goliath, this giant is huge, overwhelming, sometimes seemingly unstoppable. This giant has changed our lives for the past few months – totally changed them. This giant has separated us from each other, this giant has changed the way we live and work and socialize. This giant has instilled fear and foreboding into us. This giant brings grim news every day.

I think David's story has much to tell us about how to face this giant in our midst today. And I hope we'll listen, because if we're not careful, it would be very easy for us to get overwhelmed, and depressed and frightened for the future. It would be very easy to give up hope.

I think it's important for us to remember that, just as God equipped David for his battle with the giant Goliath, so too has God equipped us for our battle in these days. We have "slingshots" of our own, if you will.

God has given us experts in science and medicine to guide us, advise us, and who are continually working on ways to better treat the virus and vaccinate against it in the future. Gifted, dedicated servants helping to guide us through this

unknown territory. I don't know about you, but hearing them speak keeps my mind from going off into hopelessness about the pandemic.

God has also put in our arsenal leaders like Governor Hogan and others who are doing their level best to keep us safe, while enduring endless criticism at the same time.

Many of us have been blessed by God to be in a place where we can work at home, where we are safe. And yet, he walks alongside those who still go out and work where they always have, despite the risks.

Not only has God put all of those things in our arsenal, if you will, but God has also blessed us with people to stand with us in the struggle – families, friends, neighbors – people who, thanks be to God, we can connect through phone calls, or talking over the back fence, or texting, or catching up with on Facebook and other social media. They remind us daily that we are not alone in the fight against this giant – they are truly a gift that keep it from overwhelming us. I'm not sure how we could fight this without the love, care and support of family and friends, without being still connected to one another – truly, a gift from God.



Surely the greatest thing we have for this battle is God himself – his presence in our lives. We find strength by spending time in his Word – we can go to the psalms and find comfort and courage, we can read the endless stories of God’s power and strength, we can be assured over and over again that there is nothing God cannot handle.

We are strengthened too by prayer – by staying connected to God – by lifting up our praises, giving him our cares, trusting him with our concerns. In moments of panic, which most assuredly have come during this pandemic, prayer is the great “grounder,” a divine means of taking a deep breath and realizing it’s going to be okay.

Finally, what David had in his arsenal, we have in ours – and that is, trust in the God who has acted for us in the past. We’ve all known how God has carried us through some tough times, has kept us going when we didn’t think we could go on, has made a way where we couldn’t see it. We carry that knowledge in our hearts, and lean on it now in our fight with the giant of coronavirus. God who has made a way before, will make a way now with this pandemic. He will help humanity tame this giant in due time.

Like a young shepherd boy of long ago, we stand in the face of a huge giant that wants to take us down. Standing with God, using all the arsenal with which he's blessed us, we can endure the fight and count on a victory one day.

I want to close by telling you about a phone call I made this week. I was thinking about this pandemic, and how the time seems to stretch on and on with no end in sight, and I wondered how do people, how do we, get through this, how do we keep hope alive? And I thought about an old friend of mine from the last church I served.

Her name is Joan, she's now 88 years old, and I haven't seen nor talked to her since I left that church twenty years ago. But I picked up the phone and called her. She lives at the Country House in Wilmington.

I called Joan because she is British and I remembered talking to her many times about growing up in London when it was being bombed. I couldn't imagine what it was like to live in a city where at any moment a bomb might drop, shattering buildings, killing people, destroying life – especially enduring that as a

child. I couldn't imagine how you could not feel utterly defeated, devoid of hope. I wanted to know how they got through it.

So I called her this week and asked her about it. She said that she got through it because of her parents and their faith. Her parents were named Frank and Elsie, and she said they were remarkable. They all lived in an apartment in central London, and at night, Joan said, they would put her to sleep under a staircase, so that if a bomb dropped, she might have some protection. And, she said, they did all they could to keep life as normal as possible, inviting her teacher to bring some other children over to the apartment and teach them all there, keeping a regular routine, just trying to keep her from being enveloped in fear.

I asked her how they kept from being defeated by it all, how they kept from just hiding away and cowering in fear all the time – and she said it was her parents' resolve to keep their heads down, but their chins up, and to simply carry on, trusting that God would make a way – and he did.

Dear friends, that's some pretty good advice – to keep our heads down and trudge forward in this fight against the coronavirus, and any other giants we're

fighting today, but keep our chins up, knowing that the God who has been with us in the past, who equips us for the fight even today, is the one who is with us always, and will make a way, who will bring victory, even against today's giant. So, let us, like David, put on the full armor of God, use the arsenal he has given us, keep our heads down, our chins up, and trust the Lord our God through it all. May it be so.

Amen.