

I want to talk this morning about that reading we heard from the Old Testament, the well-known story of David and Goliath. It's been a favorite of mine since Sunday school. I'm sure that's true for many of you too, but this is not just a children's story. It's got a lot to teach us. In fact, in some ways, I discovered the hard way that there's aspects of this story which aren't suitable for children. I was asked once to tell the story to a kindergarten associated with my last church, and I really got into it. I had an audience of three and four-year olds. They seemed very receptive, so I got carried away with the story and carried on after it finishes after our reading. So I told them how David got hold of Goliath's sword after he killed him.

And Jeanette, the teacher, could see where I was going. She was going, "No, stop, stop," but I ignored her. "So the sword came down and Goliath's head came off and there was blood spurting everywhere." The children went very, very pale, and I wasn't invited back to do an assembly there. So I've learned my lesson. I'm not going to go into the gory bits of the story because actually, there's a lot this story can teach us at any age. It's a wonderful story.

So now, what we read from Lee was just... The story is told in great detail, and I've told the kindergarten, the end bit, but there's a bit that comes before as well that I'm going to summarize before we get onto the substance of what Lee read to us, because David had to go through a lot before he even got to see King Saul and to fight Goliath, the Philistine. David was the youngest of eight boys, and all his older brothers had gone off to fight in this war against the Philistines and their main man Goliath. And apparently in those days, the battle had reached a stalemate. And what was quite common, each army would send out a representative to fight, and that one-on-one battle would decide the fate of the war, which actually seems a great way of doing it. But anyway, that's how they did it then.

And when the battles start, David's stuck at home with his father looking after the sheep, and he only gets to the frontline where the action is when Jesse, his father, tells him to take some supplies to his brothers. And when he's there, he hears the giant Goliath challenge the Israelite army. "Give me a man to fight," said Goliath. "Let's get this battle over."

Well, when the Israelites saw this huge man with all his armor issue this challenge, their knees were quaking and they were overwhelmed with great fear, but David heard it and said, "Who is this who dares to threaten the army of the living God?" Now, such talk didn't go down well with David's older brother, Eliab. And he says, "Why are you here, little brother? You should be looking after the sheep. I know the wickedness of your heart."

Now, you might recognize something of this experience. People close to David were telling him unhelpful and untrue things. They were trying to put labels on him. Eliab said, "You've got a wicked heart," which we know isn't true because actually, later on, God says of David that he was a man after his own heart. So we know that wasn't true. He was mislabeled and things had been said to David, which could have stopped him being who he really was. I've got a sense of this experience because when I was five, I've shared this before because the wounds are so deep that my first ever school report when I was five ended with the immortal line, "Mark is a big and clumsy boy." And ever since then, when I was at home, if I dropped anything, "Ah, teacher was right. You're a bigger and clumsy boy." It stuck.

Now, that's a frivolous example. You might have examples of your own, things that have been said to you that hem you in. David overcame those words. His heart wasn't wicked. He didn't let what other people said of him mold him or hold him back, and it wasn't just his relatives he had to overcome. He then went off to see the king, Saul, and Saul wouldn't have won any prizes for encouragement either. He said to David, "You can't fight Goliath. You are just a boy." So before he even got to face the giant Goliath, David had to battle with his brothers and the king. Those were the first hurdles he had to get past, and I reckon that too many of us wouldn't have even got to that point. We'd have let the negative voices around us hold us back, give us an excuse, but we are not to listen to those voices.

Instead, we should listen to the voice of our heavenly father, our creator, who says to each one of us, we can claim for ourselves the words of the prophet Isaiah, "but now, thus says the Lord, he who created you, he who formed you, 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are

mine." Those are the words that should shape us and encourage us. That's the voice we should listen to. David knew that, and he allowed himself to be molded by God, not by the negative voices of others, and that's why he was able to take on the challenge of facing the giant Philistine, Goliath. Saul was eventually persuaded to let David take up the challenge, but first, he tried to put his armor on David. He put on his armor, put on a bronze helmet, gave him a big spear, but David wasn't comfortable with this. He couldn't even walk in it. He took them off and armed himself with something else. He picked up five smooth stones and carried a sling. He went into battle with a sling and five stones.

Now, I want to say that this is not as crazy as it sounds. It's not like going to fight a heavenly armed giant with a feather duster. That's not what's happening here. David doesn't simply say, "God will protect me," and then rush towards the enemy with his tongue hanging out with a wild look on his face. He has the experience of fighting wild animals. He arms himself with weapons that he's comfortable with. He knows that he's more nimble than a heavily armed giant. This isn't a story of God doing the impossible. It's a story of a young man who trusts in God, who uses the skills and the gifts which God has given him.

God has a plan and a task for each of us, and to complete that task, we must be ourselves and use the tools and the gifts with which we've been given. David went out with five smooth stones. What would you go and get? What skills and gifts do you have to do God's will? Too often, we worry about what we don't have. We worry about the size of the giant in front of us. We wish we were someone else, but each of us has a unique task and a unique skillset to draw upon. As I've said, it's important to note that when David went out to confront Goliath, he wasn't being reckless or stupid. He was trusting. He thought, "God will take what I have to slay this giant." He had confidence that he would win the fight because God was with him. He said, "This day, the Lord will hand you over to me." Not, "I'm going to beat you. I'm stronger than you." It's the Lord who he knew would win the battle for him.

There's a great French philosopher, well, he died now, but he's called Paul Ricoeur, and he talked

about the second naivete. He said when we're young, we are naive and we're trusting, and there's something extremely attractive and winsome about that. But the older we get, we get distrustful. We can slip into cynicism. Faith is learning to trust again. We can't ever trust like a child. That stage has passed, but as our faith grows, we learn to trust again and develop what Ricoeur called a second naivete that is appropriate for an adult. That's what David is doing here. He's not simply naive and reckless. He doesn't madly rush at the giant unarmed. He takes care to arm himself and trust that God will do the rest. That's the way of faith. It's to do what we can and trust God to do the rest.

When St. Theresa was laughed at for saying she wanted to build an orphanage with three shillings, she answered, "Well, with three shillings, Teresa can do nothing, but with God and three shillings, there is nothing that Teresa cannot do."

Let's not try and solve our problems on our own strength. That's like David putting the armor of Saul on. It's grown up and it's sensible, but it's not right. The right thing to do is to trust God and use the gifts that he has given us. When David saw Goliath coming at him, he didn't panic. He didn't focus on Goliath's size. He focused instead on God's might. The army of Israel forgot that. All they saw was this enormous man. They forgot who was battling with them, and they prove the truth of the saying, "Worry doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength."

So let's allow this great story of David and Goliath to renew our own strength. Let's learn the lesson of David, who trusted God as he fought with giants. We've all got giants in our lives. Let's not focus on them, but instead, focus on the God who is mighty and strong to save. Amen.