

Series: Joy in the Journey

Today: David

Text: I Samuel 17:17-37; 50

A Sermon preached by the Rev. Randolph T. Riggs, D.Min.

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First Presbyterian Church of Lancaster, PA

Our journey of faith this morning is the journey of David. His name in Hebrew means “beloved one,” and surely his journey is a story of how much he was loved by God and used by God to change the course of Israel’s history. In some ways it is a “rags to riches” story: a shepherd boy who is anointed by Samuel to become the second King in Israel’s history.

During his forty year reign, David managed to take a loose-knit coalition of family tribes and build them into an empire the likes of which Israel had never experienced before and has never seen since. His success is one of the primary reasons why hundreds of years later, when Israel was occupied by Rome, the people prayed for “a son of David” to free them and establish the Kingdom of God on earth once again. It is why, when Matthew writes a genealogy, that another man from Bethlehem, the one we know as Jesus, is hailed as King of the Jews.

David was the youngest son of Jesse. You may recall that Jesse’s grandmother was Ruth connecting him to our journey from last week. He was chosen by God to be the King of Israel, anointed by Samuel (one of the strong leaders we know as Judges), but before he was elevated to that role, he had to prove himself as the warrior. We know his story as the one who saved Israel from the Philistines. It is that story of his victory over Goliath which is familiar to us which is our text for this morning. It is a story so familiar that it is the stuff which comedians love to use because they don’t have to give all the history behind it. In fact, when I told one of the guys at

the YMCA what my sermon was about this week, he said, *“Tell your people this story and you are guaranteed a laugh.”*

It seems an archaeologist was digging in the Negev Desert in Israel and came upon a sarcophagus containing a mummy. After examining it, he called the curator of a prestigious natural-history museum. "I've just discovered the 3,000-year-old mummy of a man who died of heart failure!" the excited archaeologist exclaimed. The curator replied, "Bring him in. We'll check it out."

A week later, the amazed curator called the archaeologist. "You were right about the mummy's age and cause of death. How in the world did you know it was heart failure that killed him?" he asked. The archaeologist replied, "Well, I think the guy must have been pretty heavy into gambling. When I was unwrapping him, I found a piece of paper in his hand that read, '10,000 shekels on Goliath,' and I knew he probably died of heart failure."

This morning I want to suggest to you that the story of David and Goliath tells us three things about the character of David which will both haunt him and shape him as he becomes the King of Israel. It tells us that David was: 1) A Man of Mixed Motives; 2) A Man of Great Courage; 3) A Man Who Trusted God.

A Man of Mixed Motives

Our story begins when David is sent by his father, Jesse, to carry food to his brothers who were preparing to battle the Philistines in the valley of Elah. While there, he hears of the challenge which had been issued by Goliath to avoid the bloodshed of thousands. The challenge was to pick one man from their ranks to fight Goliath hand-to-hand and allow whoever won to establish who would win the territory in dispute.

Now David didn't understand why no one would pick up the challenge issued by Goliath. He is a faithful Israelite who believed that God was on the side of the Jews, but before he volunteers, he asked the age old question, *"What's in it for me?"* It is right there in verse 26, *'What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach of Israel?'* In other words, *"What's in it for me?"*

It may come as a surprise to you that the man whom God used to establish God's kingdom on the earth had a selfish streak in him. Maybe it is a surprise because we expect that people who are used by God must be different than we are, and then we find out they are really just like us. David asks the question that most people might ask, *"If I am going to risk my life, what's in it for me?"* Having asked it, he was also able to rise above that question to think about how he might be used by God to accomplish a great thing.

Max Lucado tells a story about a man named Rogers Cadenhead. It turns out that Cadenhead is a speculator in domain names who, upon the death of Pope John Paul II, registered a domain name, www.BenedictXVI.com, before the new Pope's name was announced. Cadenhead secured it before Rome knew they needed it. The right domain name can prove lucrative. Another name, PopeBenedictXVI.com, surpassed \$16,000 on eBay.

It turns out that Cadenhead didn't want money, but he did want something in return, though. In exchange for the name, Cadenhead sought: 1. One of those hats; 2. A free stay at the Vatican hotel; 3. Complete absolution, no questions asked, for the third week of March, 1987. Makes you wonder what happened that week, doesn't it? [Source: *Max Lucado, Facing Your Giants (W Publishing Group, 2006), p. 131-132*]

We need to be honest about David and ourselves before we move on. He was a man of mixed motives, and we are a people of mixed motives. It was one of his fatal flaws that would

haunt him over and over again throughout his life; just as our mixed motives haunt us in our lives. He kills two hundred Philistines for the right to marry King Saul's daughter. He places Bathsheba's husband in the line of fire, knowing that he will likely be killed, but David wanted a relationship with Bathsheba. He sets Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in the heart of Palestinian homeland in order to unite the 12 tribes of Israel in a central place. He uses religion to establish power by building the Temple in the place where the seat of government is, and centuries later we are still fighting over whose it is. David was a man of mixed motives, and yet in spite of his mixed motives, God was able to use him to do the right thing at the right time in God's view of history.

A Man of Great Courage

David was also a man of great courage. No matter what his mixed motives were, he placed the good of Israel above his own fears. He offers himself as the one to accept the challenge of Goliath. The strongest warriors in Israel's army were fearful of the challenge, but David took five stones and a sling shot to face overwhelming odds, and he is remembered by those who are religious and those who are not as a man of courage.

In a time when our values are being challenged by economic uncertainty, we need the courage of David to slay the Goliaths of fear and uncertainty, don't we? We live in a culture that is so focused on the downturn in our economy that we forget that we are still the most blessed people in the world. What I find fascinating is this: according to a recent survey I read, the vast majority of people in this country really do believe that there is more to life than the rise and fall of the Dow Jones average or the number of people who are unemployed. People want to believe that something is more important than the status of our retirement savings, but we seem to have been captured by our fears instead of our faith.

A study conducted by *Success* magazine uncovered some surprising insights into the way Americans view success [Source: *"The New American Dream," Success (Summer 2006), p. 88*]. For example, in response to the phrase, "Success in business means...", 60 percent of the respondents selected "Adding value to the lives of others," while only 18.8 percent said success meant "Making a lot of money." In addition, respondents were asked to identify "The most important factors for success": Good relationship with family—89.9 percent; Good relationship with spouse—89.6 percent; Good relationship with God—86.0 percent.

It takes the courage of a David to stand up and be counted in these difficult times we are experiencing in our economy. Perhaps it is time for those of us who believe that success is measured by strong values rooted in faith to stand up and be counted.

A Man Who Trusted God

David's dying words give us the character of the man. It wasn't that he was perfect. He was a man of many failures in his life. However, he learned from those failures, and in the end he learned to trust God in all things. When Saul questions him about being realistic about standing up to Goliath, David says, *"The Lord who saved me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will save me from this Philistine."* He passes on this legacy to his son, Solomon, in the second chapter of I Kings (I Kings 2:2-3): ² *"I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. "So be strong, show yourself a man,³ and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go,"*

Today is Reformation Sunday; a day when we are reminded of the faithfulness of another hero of our faith, Martin Luther. I have a feeling Luther must have identified with David. He felt called by God to stand up to the Goliath of the Roman Catholic church and speak truth to power.

Luther's life filled with contradictions which he often wrote about. He acknowledged how difficult it was for him to trust God. When his barber and lifelong friend asked him for advice on how to pray, he wrote: *Dear Master Peter [Beskendorf, Luther's barber and lifelong friend]: I will tell you as best I can what I do personally when I pray May our dear Lord grant to you and to everybody to do it better than I! Amen.*

He went on to advise his friend of his spiritual practices which he felt he needed at least once a day in order to combat the work of evil in the world. He spoke of reading spiritual practices like the Psalms, reciting the Ten Commandments, saying the Creeds, listening for the words of Jesus or of Paul. Then he concluded: *When your heart has been warmed by such recitation to yourself (of the Ten Commandments, the words of Christ, etc.) and is intent upon the matter, kneel or stand with your hands folded and your eyes toward heaven and speak or think as briefly as you can, "O Heavenly Father, dear God, I am a poor unworthy sinner. I do not deserve to raise my eyes or hands toward thee or to pray But because thou hast commanded us all to pray and hast promised to hear us and through thy dear Son Jesus Christ hast taught us both how and what to pray, I come to thee in obedience to thy word, trusting in thy gracious promise. [Source: Martin Luther, from "A Simple Way to Pray" (1535) in "Martin Luther--Later Years and Legacy," Christian History, no. 39.]*

Throughout his life, even though it was a struggle at times, both Luther and David trusted God, and God honored that trust by allowing him to be the greatest King Israel has ever known.

Conclusion

David, a man of mixed motives, great courage, in spite of his frail humanity, a man who trusted God. May his journey intersect our journey as we go forth in faith to serve.