

“Five Smooth Stones”

1 Samuel 17:31-49

Dr. Anne M. Cameron

June 21, 2009

Lake Highlands Presbyterian Church

Last week we heard about the anointing of Jesse’s youngest son David as the next king of Israel. Today we continue our summer blockbuster series of the David saga, with a return to the old time-worn favorite, that big hit, “David Kills Goliath”. Trust me, I didn’t pick this one out for Father’s Day. It was the assigned Old Testament reading for the day.

Just about everyone knows this one, even people who have never stepped foot inside a church or opened a Bible. It’s a classic: small guy conquers big guy, the unexpected twist, with a strong dose of gory violence and a promise of romance thrown in to keep interest high and satisfy both the men and the women.

That’s the short summary of the blockbuster. That’s the stuff you would see on the movie trailer, if there was a movie made out of this one. It *could* be a movie. It would work. Who to cast as Goliath? Mel Gibson comes to mind, even though at 5’9” he’s way too short. The staff advised me I should cast Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson. Liam Neeson would make a pretty good King Saul: tall, quiet and brooding. The star, of course, would be the handsome, ruddy young David; Zac Efron would fit the bill. On the sidelines of course you have to have the beautiful daughter of King Saul, promised to the one who kills the giant Philistine. I think Kristen Stewart (star of “Twilight”) would be perfect for the part.

But I am not here today to give you a movie trailer. I am here to dig deeper. I am going to delve into the details in the story. This story is one of the most detailed in all of scripture. Details make the story much more than interesting. Details hint of big, eternal ideas. The really inspiring elements of the story are in the details; the things we may not remember but we know are there, adding substance and spirit to what otherwise is just another boring combat story with an unexpected ending.

Detail #1. Goliath’s size and power. Some translations say he was 9 feet 9 inches, which is pretty unbelievable, even today. Other texts say he was 6 feet 9 inches, still impressively large and certainly very tall by ancient standards. This was a large and fearsome warrior, the fact of which is underlined by the long, drawn out description of his armor. Body armor that weighed 125 pounds. A spear point that weighed 15 pounds. Obviously it would take an enormously strong man to even wear the stuff, let alone do battle in it. The best armor for the fiercest and strongest man you could imagine. A general’s dream warrior. Israel doesn’t stand a chance.

What is the point of all this build up? The skeptical among you may simply say, "This is impossible! No one could have been THAT big or THAT strong!" I have to agree with you. I don't think the exact numbers are the point. I think the point is--this is a human force to be reckoned with. This is the best that human power can devise: the largest, strongest of warriors---the most sophisticated weaponry. That's the point. And whether the Philistine was 5'6" or 7'6" doesn't really matter. When you looked at him, you could see "VICTORY" plastered all over his grim face.

Detail #2. The Philistine has been demanding a suitable opponent for a long time. Forty days may or may not mean forty calendar days. In the Bible, forty refers to a long period of time. People are getting pretty restless. The Philistine is losing patience. Saul and the Israelites are growing increasingly nervous. Something's gotta give.

Detail #3. Our boy David enters the scene, no warrior, but an errand boy. In this story, David's not even much of a shepherd. He's the food delivery guy. But as soon as he arrives, David drops his bread and cheese and runs right to the front lines. He begins to ask questions. Questions that make him sound a lot more like a leader than a lackey. He says something that clearly puts him in a league all his own. "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" In this one question David points out Goliath's ungodliness and reorients Israel once again to the promise of God's strength in the battle, something King Saul seems to have forgotten along the way.

This is the crux of the story. Goliath thinks he'll be walking away from a typical battle. *Mano a mano*. Hand to hand combat. David sees it very differently. David knows he cannot possibly beat this guy. David remembers it was God who delivered him from the lion and the bear when he defended his flock, and David's faith tells him it will be Yahweh who will be the victor in this uneven match.

* * *

Have you met Goliath? I bet you have. Goliath is that huge giant of a problem in your life, that thing that seems impossible to get around, that difficulty that's been hanging over your head so long you are close to giving up, giving in, calling it quits. Goliath is the impossible odds you have to confront, the chronic pain you have to endure, the interminable illness, the estranged child you must grieve over, the dreams that were crushed long ago.

Goliath rears his huge, ugly head in nearly everyone's life from time to time. Goliath stomps around, terrorizing you with his size and his strength, draining you of hope and seizing your heart with fear.

You may spend a lot of energy pretending Goliath doesn't exist. You may distract yourself with work; you may pour yourself into relationships;

you may numb yourself with chemicals. You may put a lot of time and resources fortifying yourself and your family against some future attack, but deep down you

know you may not be able to bear it if Goliath's shadow suddenly darkens your doorstep.

Which brings us to the final interesting small detail in our story. **Five smooth stones.** David picks up five little stones from a brook. Stones for his slingshot. A child's weapon. You can just about hear the "ping!" of the stone bouncing off Goliath's heavy armor. It's pathetic.

Only it isn't. It takes only one stone to kill Goliath. David knows this is because God had already planned it to happen this way. David knows the purpose of this contest is ". . .so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear. . ." (1 Sam 17: 46-47).

Five smooth stones to vanquish the Goliaths we continue to confront. Five smooth stones to fling against the fears we cannot conquer. Five smooth stones to put ourselves on an entirely different playing field. What are they, these five smooth stones?

One stone is shaped like **trust**. Trust in God who is bigger than any Goliath. Trust in God who has promised to love and care for us, no matter what we struggle with. Trust in the power of God, in an entirely different realm than the powers of the world. Such trust requires long vision. Such trust requires being open to the promises of God.

A second stone is **faithful speech**. We learn faithful speech by learning scripture. We engage with other Christians; we are strengthened by their stories and by the way they live. We counter the unfaithful noise that is all around us by prayer, worship, and by taking in edifying, thoughtful books and movies. Words matter. Faithful words are especially powerful.

A third stone is **courageous confrontation**. Words are not the only things that matter. Actions matter, too. Speaking the truth to power, standing up for what we believe in, defending the defenseless. Giving our time and money. All are daunting weapons against fear, greed, and misery.

A fourth stone **bears witness**. With our pockets full of smooth stones, we step outside ourselves. We tell others what we have seen and heard. We encourage them to search the brooks of their lives for these stones, too. We do not hide our faith but share it.

A fifth stone has **"God" engraved on it**, instead of "me". This may be the hardest stone for us to find in this world of individualism and self-focus. The sparkling rocks of "me-me-me" may seem like a good idea, but they crumble when we put them in our slingshot and take aim. Instead, the small smooth stone that has God's name on it is the one we need to keep searching for.

Much of the pain in our lives can be traced to Goliath because Goliath has too much power over us. We shrink in fear or anxiety when life's giant difficulties show up.

If we pay close attention to people around us, we will discover every single one of us has been living in fear of Goliath. Freedom from Goliath is good news, the good news that only God can bring. Put these five stones in your pocket (trust, faithful speech, courageous confrontation, witness, and God). Rely on God. Allow God to vanquish your enemy.

God provides five smooth stones. All we need is a slingshot.