

1 Samuel 17
June 21, 2015
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David and Goliath. It's an epic story. One that immediately conjures up images of the small (but virtuous) vanquishing over the powerful (and, of course, less virtuous). This is a story that if you were raised in the church, you heard regularly - emphasizing that even the youngest among us can have a mighty impact.

Read in its entirety, the story takes on a slightly different - but still in the same family line - tone. Or maybe it's just because I live with a fourteen year old boy for whom *The Avengers* and Marvel comics is really the center of popular culture.

Super heros - swooping in, garbed in all sorts of wild and hulked out images - there to save the day, beat the enemy, vanquish evil. In these comics it is usually clear who will win the day, even if you're not sure which cliffs they will need to dangle off of before they reach that goal.

Their strength and their determination to use their powers for good are all that you need to know in order to be confident in their ability to triumph over whatever exaggerated character of evil they are fighting in that issue.

Just like David and Goliath. David - a boy that has been anointed by Samuel to succeed King Saul, but even more to the point, David filled with the spirit of God. And Goliath, a monstrous hulk of a Philistine. Who is not even circumcised, for Pete's sake. And represents a major threat to the security of Israel.

David swoops into the story - delivering cheese and bread to his family and the king. He naively and bravely offers to fight Goliath. He has to offer twice to face this man who for the last forty days no member of the Israelite army has been willing to challenge.

The king offers his suit of armor as a gesture of goodwill, I suppose. But it does not fit David, is far too heavy and would severely limit his range of motion. And instead David heads into this confrontation with five stones and his super power.

David kills Goliath with the first stone and carries his head into town to show to all those gathered who has been overcome and by whom. The enemy is vanquished. David has saved the day. Good has won over evil yet again. And the Israelites can sleep soundly in their beds.

It's a wonderful, uncomplicated story. Until one takes a step back, and asks the question - who is the enemy in this story? Only the loser of the battle. As they say, history belongs to the victor, and scripture are certainly no exception to this adage.

So the classic enemy - the giant who towers over Saul's army and threatens to make them all his slaves - Goliath is the enemy here.

He is part of the Philistine tribe that has settled along the seacoast. His people have made significant inroads in metallurgy which makes his army that much more dangerous. Their weapons and shields far out-perform anything the Israelites could make.

With this weaponry at hand and their settlement so close, of course the Israelites perceive them as threat and define as enemy.

But how different are these Philistines from Israelites? Not much. They produce crops to feed their people. They engage in trade with other tribes and nations. They work to expand their claim on the land and thus determine greater security for their nation.

The problem with stories about super heroes is that there is little room for nuance. There is little room for blending of right and wrong, of seeing the ways in which we each can bring about an escalation of violence in our world.

David is a remarkable character from the Hebrew Scriptures. And he is a monumental leader in helping establish Israeli identity. King Saul, his predecessor, turned out to be fairly ineffective and by the end of his reign could be described as so beset by mental illness as to be a great hindrance to his people.

Scripture doesn't remember David as perfect. But they do immortalize him as powerful. And this story is the opening act of marvels yet to come.

While we all long for a hero - someone to rescue us from the constant battles of misunderstanding and cultural difference with the middle east, someone to speak out and make changes to truly affect climate crisis, someone to eradicate the huge wealth imbalance in our nation - while we all long for a hero to save us from our trials, the reality is he or she does not exist.

Because just as the enemy is not so cookie cutter, neither is the hero. There are no David's and no Goliath's in real life - only in cartoons.

The problems that face our world today cannot be taken out with a single smooth stone. We will have to work together to build whatever future we can hope to have. My stone, your stone, the stones of our so-called enemies, the stones we do not even know we are holding in our hands.

The call of the gospel is so different from this pantomime of good and evil. The gospel is about the good news we find when we can admit our faults through grace and forgive our justified or not justified anger towards those who we call enemies.

This week we witnessed again in our country evil with a gun. But the shooting in Charleston also provided a window into the gospel message. Showing a profound way to see the other and define the enemy.

Nadine Collier, daughter of Ethel Lance who was shot and killed, said at the bond hearing, "You took something very precious away from me. I will never talk to her ever again. I will never be able to hold her again. But I forgive you. And have mercy on your soul."

It seems that Nadine and the others from her church who were tragically affected by this shooting refuse to make Dylann Roof their enemy - as justified as the culture would say they are.

The power of the gospel message is found when we use the stones we could easily throw at another to build a monument that captures the humanity of our so-called enemy.

A monument that cautions us to remember that behind the tragedy and trauma, all of us plan picnics, sing songs, celebrate birthdays, relish in a summer's evening.

In the glamorous, glossy world of the cartoon we can relish in solutions that pit one against another but in the subdued, matted messy world we actually live in the solution involves everyone. That I think is the call of God. To love self and neighbor, stranger and enemy and together to use our stones for the building of peace. The solution involves everyone using their powers for good.

Amen

