

Bible Stories for Big People: David and Goliath, 1 Samuel 17:4-11, 32-49 (NLT)
Rev. Pat Weatherwax, July 8, 2018

“⁴⁷ And everyone assembled here will know that the LORD rescues his people, but not with sword and spear.”

INTRODUCTION/ EXPLANATION

It really helped, in 2017, to have a plan for when I was assigned to preach- some true sense of direction. I decided for this year to preach from the stories which usually we focus on with the children. Interestingly I prepared this sermon and presented it a few weeks ago at Westlake Church. Pray for them- they are in the middle of some tough decisions. Anyway it was sitting in my computer for use, maybe later in the summer, but it was just what we needed for today. It's a good introduction to David, and you will be hearing more of the lessons from his life the rest of this month.

CONTEXT The OT story of David and Goliath. I read just some of it.

There appears to be more than one author's account of the David's story put together to make our lengthy narrative. Manuscripts differ from the Hebrew and early Greek manuscripts into our versions. For example, in chapter 16 David is already Saul's armor bearer (16:21-23) and serving him full-time. In chapter 17 David is only at the battle-line to bring provisions to his big brothers. Whatever, just curious to read in context. What else, contextually?

Notice; there's a lot of dialogue. The “trash-talking” was part of the fighting; psychological advantage helps when combat is hand to hand. You had to get pretty close to hurt your opponent. In those days, David's slingshot was actually considered an accurate and effective weapon. It was just hard to find a spot on Goliath that wasn't protected by his armor!

One of the problems modern society has with the Bible is the prevalence of violence, and not just by “the bad guys!” David is our hero because he killed a big bully and cut off his head? It shouldn't surprise us that modern families don't particularly want to teach these stories. I'm not sure why this is considered a kid friendly story. Except the littles understand bullies pretty well.

PREQUEL What are the lessons we teach our kids?

There's two usual (or maybe unusual) reference series I'm using for these sermons. One is a small cardboard book set for babies. The one for David shows a smiling child with a shield as tall as he is; with a menacing sword. David probably was not *that* little of a kid, thankfully.

The book for elementary aged kids is darker, more menacing. And it has an interesting specific error when compared to the Bible text. The account in 1 Samuel (17:48-49) points out that Goliath after David's rock found it's mark, Goliath fell "face down"- what my OT seminary professor pointed out to us was a posture of worship and submission to God. The two pages of the artwork depicting a dead Goliath in the kids' book doesn't show that. When you get hit in the forehead the force pushes you backward. Not Goliath, he fell face down; the forces of evil are brought down to worship God- that's one of the points for us to see!

This is why we continue to review these stories. As Dr, Boogaart shared: "so much more was going on in the biblical narratives than history-writing. The writers/composers were sophisticated theologians, not just chroniclers [of] factual information or editors of texts."

LESSONS A few weeks back when Taylor Brown was preparing his Father's Day sermon for us, Jeff Carlson told him: "Every passage from the Bible can generate at least 12 sermons." We could probably dig that many adult lessons from this narrative. Here's some points I came across, besides evil succumbing to worship God in the end:

- All of Israel and especially Saul are intimidated by their "giant" problems.
- David calls on the "living God", acknowledging God's power and presence.
- David has what OT scholar Walter Brueggemann called "youthful nerve and passionate faith". (Interpretation series on 1 Samuel, p. 130). That's why we miss having lots of younger people in our churches. But all Christ-followers can be bold and passionate, at any age or stage.
- David looked for and found *alternatives* to conventional self defense and to normal battle offense. There are always options in life!
- Goliath has armor but hasn't put on "God's whole armor". You've heard of that, from Ephesians 6? The armor of God: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and the Spirit of God (Eph 6:11-17). That's the kind of armor we need to rely on. (And here's, finally, my point today:)
- Yahweh helps, rescues, saves us, YES, but not by warfare. NOT by earthly power. See verse 47 again- David said:

⁴⁷ And everyone assembled here will know that the LORD rescues his people, but not with sword and spear. This is the LORD's battle, and the LORD will give you to us!"

Why is that statement in there, if the lesson of David and Goliath is to win by force, or by whatever means we find? Is it only about winning and losing?

There are differing ways to address issues we face as we live our day to day life. The best? Not aggressively, not passively, but assertively. Christians should be aware of the need to "reason together". Head and heart. Thoughtful action. Understanding

others' opinions and viewpoints, respectfully. Agreeing that we can't always agree, and that we can only control our own responses to conflict and divisions.

Here's three issues around using force that are huge and divisive right now-

1. Immigration laws- what a few weeks it's been
2. Israel and Palestine- 60 years of violence and struggle.
3. And one that isn't going away: Gun control

We **are** going to be rescued, save, helped by God, but weapons are not our savior.

Are you reading *The Secret Diary of Hendrik Groen*? Disclaimer: I enjoy this book, and suggested it for fun and to promote discussion. But there are a few parts that are a bit bawdy or off-color. I apologize for that, but not for the topics and discussion I think it might bring up. Pick up a copy and a discussion guide this summer, if you're interested.

Anyway, it seems that in the Netherlands, the reputation is that in the USA, there are guns everywhere, maybe even in our kids' hands and probably in our assisted living centers! (p. 155, "May 11").

That seems understandable. Our local newspaper recently reported there has been 8 reported incidences of people and property being shot, in Battle Creek, just since June 20. People aren't communicating with the police- preferring to settle matters with shots fired.

I think David teaches us that weapons are not the answer. In 2018 Goliath would have had an assault rifle and obliterated the people of Israel in a few heart beats. And the verse would still apply: "**the LORD rescues his people, but not with weapons**". God wants to rescue us. We want to have the right to shoot people.

Some say the church has no business speaking out on gun violence because it's a political issue, not a faith issue, At the recent 2018 PCUSA General Assembly Rev. Jim Atwood, an advocate for violence prevention had this response: "Each of the 39 *thousand* gun victims last year was born in the image of God and is a neighbor that God commands us to love. Can you think of anything more spiritual than that?"

We can argue both ways about Jesus' attitude toward use of force. Matthew 26:52 is the most obvious weapon *control* scripture. Jesus said: "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."

Jesus also taught his followers to change the way they had been living. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemies. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.'" (Matthew 5:43-45) .

There's solid evidence in the gospels that Jesus was a pacifist. If ever there was a time for Jesus to rally an armed insurrection it was at the feeding of the 5,000. He had the people gathered and listening! But he didn't incite a riot. He sat them down and had a meal for which he gave thanks, blessed and shared with everyone.

There *is* that passage of Jesus driving people out of the temple. And also, Jesus commanded His disciples to go sell their robes (if necessary) to buy swords for their self defense (Luke 22:36). Context in these passages means a lot, and there's not an easy answer to "WWJD what would Jesus do". But throughout all four Gospels Jesus

teaches love, peace, compassion, mercy and reason, even with and toward our enemies.

America is increasingly returning to its militaristic culture, worshiping the power of weapons over the power of peace, compassion, mercy and reason. In a recent edition of the journal, Christianity Today (May 18, 2018) the editor, Mark Galli wrote an editorial: “God Hates **Gun Violence**: (sub-titled) We American Christians have a biblical call to reduce firearm deaths in our land”. He points out many Biblical references that say God abhors violence, (and he writes)

Mass shootings force us to pay attention to our violent DNA. They also prompt our endless debates about guns. ...

Each side has valid points, and as Christians enter this debate, we should not cocoon ourselves but really try to listen to the other side. Only then might we help formulate policies that can work for all Americans. (He continues:)

Here’s how Christianity Today views the issue (and I concur): Owning guns is legitimate, and guns have reasonable recreational uses, including sport shooting and hunting. But guns are one of many potentially dangerous items of everyday life—like driving, like making fires, like flying. To make society safer, we regulate such activities. ... to regulate rights does not restrict freedom but actually makes it possible. We Christians, for example, champion the right to practice religion freely while gladly submitting to building and zoning codes, noise laws, and many other “restrictions” for the sake of community harmony.

So while we support the legitimacy of owning guns, given the violence of our land and God’s hatred of violence, we also see a need to regulate the purchase and use of guns. In particular, we Christians should work to ban weapons whose main purpose is to kill a lot of people very quickly, to keep guns in general out of the hands of unstable personalities, and to ensure that everyone who buys and owns guns can demonstrate they know how to use and store them safely.

Will this alone eliminate American violence? Hardly. The problem runs too deeply in our veins as descendants of Cain. Other contributors (like the glorification of guns and violence in TV and movies, to name just one) must also be addressed. (end quote from Christianity Today)

We heard in our call to worship this morning:

Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

God is our Protector and Provider. In our Bible, especially through the prophets it says God hates evil and injustice. We are to be pro-gospel and pro-Christ. We are called to give witness to the Prince of Peace. I read one Christian argue that “only armed citizens can stop armed criminals.” I don’t believe that. I believe in the power of God’s peace to change things. Our mandate is to find ways to promote peace and hope, faithfully and sacrificially. Representing Christ must remain our top priority, despite what may happen.

How **do** we respond? Our denomination has advocated for Christian action in regards to addressing violence, for decades. Here are suggestions are based upon the recommendations approved by the 219th General Assembly (2010) in *Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call*. More work has been done at this year's GA. (paper copies available- PLEASE take one and pick one action step.)

10 Things You Can Do to Prevent Gun Violence

1. Contact your representatives in the U.S. Congress and ask that they support:
 - a. universal background checks and waiting periods for all gun purchases.
 - b. a ban on semiautomatic assault weapons, armor piercing handgun ammunition and .50 caliber sniper rifles.
2. Identify the organizations in your community engaged in gun violence prevention and get involved.
3. Attend a peaceful demonstration or public prayer service to end gun violence.
4. Contact your mayor and city council members and demand that steps be taken in your community to prevent gun violence.
5. Help close the gun show loophole that allows purchases with NO BACKGROUND CHECKS.
6. Schedule a screening of *Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence* for your group or organization. Visit the *Trigger* website at triggerdoc.com to order materials and get suggestions on hosting a screening.
7. Join or form a local chapter of *Heeding God's Call*, a faith-based movement to end gun violence. Visit heedinggodscall.org/ for more information.
8. Ask the leaders of your worshipping community to address gun violence in worship services (with periodic preaching, liturgies and prayers) and education classes. Resources can be found at pcusa.org/gunviolence.
9. Learn about your state's concealed carry laws (that may allow guns to be carried openly, including into houses of worship). Encourage your places of work and worship to prominently display signs that prohibit carrying guns onto their property.
10. Encourage those you know (citizens, hunters and law enforcement officials) who regularly handle weapons properly to be wise examples in reducing risks and teaching how to prevent the misuse of deadly force.

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How **do** we respond? We respond in prayer, with faith and action.

Let's do that.

Holiest Lord, when right and wrong are gray definitions, when we disagree with our brothers and sisters and especially when we fear those who would harm us, help us find your peace and walk in your ways, to your glory. amen