

**Facing our Goliaths**  
20 June 2021  
High Street Uniting Church Frankston  
David Fotheringham

**Read: 1 Samuel 17: 1-11, 19-23, 32-49**

*Guide us, O God, by your word and Holy Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find freedom, and in your will discover our peace; through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

When the Israelites were in exile in Babylon a few centuries in the future from this story, they looked back, and they reflected on the ways of God with them and how they had come to be in exile. And they looked back to their golden age, to the time of King David, and they reflected on what their ideal King was like. This story, so memorable, and so easily told and recounted around campfires and bedsides and synagogues alike, epitomises so much about what their ideal King is like.

When dark forces are ranged against Israel, on one side of the valley, all filled with the hostile Philistine army; and on the Israel side, all the people are intimidated at the surely scary sight, and the old King, the one who turned out to be no good, King Saul, was stuck and afraid and unable to come up with a proactive policy or make any movement forward, along comes the young David, bringing supplies for his older brothers. This intimidating big champion of the Philistines is taunting the Israelites, and no one dares to take him on. But David comes in with nothing more than a few pebbles and – crucially – faith in God. And some trust in the skills that God has given him and that he's honed from defending his sheep. And he takes down the giant, and Israel is saved. This story was saved for very good reason, and has pride of place in Scripture.

We see why last week Samuel had been directed to anoint him, passing over his older siblings. This is the kind of King we want fighting our battles! It's certainly the kind of King that the Israelites wanted.

It's natural to ask how this might relate to *our* battles. There are three matters of perspective that we need to consider.

First of all, getting some perspective on Goliath.

In the story, the whole side of the valley opposite the Israelites is covered with the swarm of the armour-clad Philistine army. The picture is utterly daunting. This is an army that no individual can defeat. But, like most intractable problems, you actually need to chunk it down to what victories *can* be achieved. And in this case, while the whole army is the problem, there's a person out the front who makes a big difference. He's their champion. And, in fact, he's the immediate problem. He's intimidating – he looks big and scary. But is he actually invincible? No, although it takes every ounce of courage and faith to stare him in the face. It's much easier to make like most of the soldiers in the field that day and

turn to each other and tell each other what a problem that Goliath is, without actually doing much. How easily we can fall into that trap! There are usually at least smaller things, or very well targeted things, that we can do.

It is important to acknowledge that not all things are easily defeated, even with the best pebbles and slingshots. Not all of the giants we face can be hit with a stone, like Goliath. When Jesus comes to the point of facing death and abandonment, we see the emotions of his prayer in Gethsemane, even as he prepares to entrust himself to God come what may. Then, with the Roman army before him and the certainty of his death, he deals with the immediate things in front of him: someone whose ear had been cut off; Peter's struggles in faith; handing over the care of his mother; his thirst, and he trusts in God with the rest. All of that takes the same sort of courage and faith that David took to that battle-field.

What sort of perspective do we need about the Goliaths that we face? Do we need to defeat a whole army, or just what is immediately in front of us to face?

Secondly, we need perspective on God. This story is all about the Israelite's model king who sees that whole battle as belonging to God. The young David's life is both practical – he's a shepherd – and faithful – thankful for the God things God provides in his world, looking for God's direction in the hard things that occur in his world. That kind of thankfulness and attention to God's calling help David to be aligned with God, to recognise that the battle is God's.

If climate change seems like the undefeatable Philistine army, then let's recognise that the battle to care for creation is entirely aligned with God, who loves the world. Which makes it a battle worth joining. On the other hand, if the giants we find ourselves fighting are more personal, we find that God is with us personally, knowing us deeply and holding us through it all. Practicing our openness to God in prayer – prayers of thanks, prayers for help – we remember that we don't enter the battles alone.

And indeed, sometimes God raises up other people who provide the help that we cannot. In the case of our story, from the perspective of a regular Israelite soldier, David had been raised up by God to help. Who are the people being raised up by God to help us in the battles that we face? For battles against COVID or climate change or poverty – how do we support those people who God has raised up to make a difference? For battles that are deeply personal, how do we appreciate the help we receive from God through others?

Which brings me to perspectives on ourselves.

God gives each of us gifts, and skills, and vulnerabilities. And when we face hard battles, fear is a factor for us. Sometimes the fears are irrational, sometimes they are very rational. We can only bring them before God, and ask that God give us the strength to deal with what's immediately in front of us, and not be distracted by the Philistine army behind. It's like David with his slingshot – he didn't try to hit the whole army. He focused the skill God had given him on the most important thing in front of him. He did the thing he could,

trusting that it was part of God's battle. And at the core, attending to his relationship with God in gratitude and prayer gave him the perspective for it.

And so it is for us.

For a people who were in exile, this story reminded them that the characteristics that they longed for in someone to fight their battles was someone with faith and courage, a close relationship with God able to see how the battle is God's, while playing their part in the gifting of God.

It's a model for us, and a model for Jesus who takes on not just armies, but mortality itself. May we take courage from his story as we sing the song, "Yours be the glory" ...