

“just a boy”

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First Presbyterian Church  
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**Old Testament Lesson: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10**

**New Testament Lesson: 1 Samuel 17:32-40, 48-49**

There is an old story about an aged pious man named Rabbi Susya, who became fearful as death drew near. His friends chided him, saying, “What! Are you afraid that you’ll be reproached that you were not Moses?” “No, not that I was not Moses,” replied the rabbi, “but that I was not Susya.”

The past two weeks we have been journeying along side the ancient Israelites as they, first, got what they demanded – a king like Saul, who was tall, handsome and strong, but also impulsive, arrogant, disobedient, self-serving and even fearful.<sup>1</sup> Then we saw that God rejected King Saul, and selected the shepherd boy David as the next king of Israel. And today, we see into the character of David, the character of this boy, this man after God’s own heart. And through that, we may just come to understand what troubled old Rabbi Susya, that maybe in the end he wasn’t who God created him to be, the best Susya he could be.

The story of David and Goliath comes right after Samuel anoints him as the future king. But its a full 32 years before David will eventually be crowned king of Israel.<sup>2</sup> And throughout those 32 years, David is transformed, from shepherd to king. It’s a process that tests David’s character, skills, and abilities. Think of it as a 32-year job interview or training period. And think of David’s encounter with Goliath as his entrance exam at this stage of his life. We go through a lot of stages in our lives, don’t we? We go through a lot of transformations – from being children and teens like the shepherd boy David, to becoming young men and women wondering what to do with our lives, to reaching independent adulthood and making our way in the world. And, it doesn’t stop there. Then we become established in our various roles in life – maybe as a wife or husband; parent or grandparent, aunt or uncle; mentor or just a good friend and confidant. At some point along the way, we may learn a trade or take on a profession. And eventually we retire and maybe our primary role becomes community volunteer or neighborhood helper. And in all these transitions, we like David, **are tested and shaped**, guided to move forward if things go well, or perhaps to choose another path if things go south. And when I say things might go south, I’m not saying we give up or change course just because things become difficult, or even if our goals seem impossible. When things get difficult or seem impossible, that’s merely an indication that we need to reassess the situation, but not necessarily give up. It’s a time to check in with a trusted friend or loved one, sit down with a counselor or spiritual guide, enter into a prayerful attitude and seek God’s direction and will for our lives. We all face such times in life, but not all of us turn to God and to the people whom God has put in our lives for guidance and assistance. Some of us set our hearts on doing things the way always done them, even if it didn’t work, or maybe we cut corners, try to rig the system, or trade on a past success to get an unfair advantage in a future endeavor.

For example, four college buddies were so overly confident the weekend before finals they decided to go up to Dallas and party with some friends instead of studying. They had a great time. However, after all the partying, they slept all day Sunday and didn’t

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix #1

<sup>2</sup> <http://livingstonesclass.org/Archive/DavidChronologyGross.pdf>

make it back to Austin until early Monday morning. Rather than taking the final at that time, they decided to find their professor and explain to him why they missed it. They had had a “flat tire” on the way back from Dallas and didn’t have a spare. That was the excuse they made up for missing the final. The professor thought it over and then agreed they could take a make-up test. The guys were elated, and relieved. They studied that night and went in the next day. The professor placed them in separate rooms and handed each of them a test booklet. They looked at the first problem, worth 5 points. It was something simple about free radical formation. “Cool,” they thought at the same time, each one in his separate room. “This is going to be easy.” Each finished the problem and then turned the page. On the second page was written just one thing: “(For 95 points): Which tire?” When things got difficult and seemed impossible, the four friends decided to take the easy way out. They turned their back on who God created them to be, and when trouble followed, they didn’t come clean before God and their professor - trusting in a spirit of compassion and restraint. They did things their way.

But not David. While David was in no way perfect as he rose to king and then ruled over Israel, David was someone after God’s own heart. Come what may, David turned it over to the Lord and sought to follow God’s will. In David’s first battle, as a shepherd boy, coming up against unimaginable forces, we see what it was that destined David to be the greatest king to ever rule on earth. In this first test of his character, David displays **great faith, loyalty, and courage**. There are four things that David does to maintain his faith, loyalty and courage. We will encounter these four things during this final leg of our journey alongside David and the other Israelites. And I’ll point them out to you as we do. They may be things we would want to focus on in our individual lives, as we strive for the success God would have us enjoy. For now though, let’s continue our journey. David hears of the fear that Goliath struck into the hearts of King Saul and all his men, and he says to Saul, ‘Let no one’s heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.’ David’s first concern was for the people of Israel and their fear, wasn’t it? But how does King Saul respond? He belittles David, doesn’t he? “You are just a boy,” he says. But instead of attacking back, David responds with a list of his credentials; he responds by reaffirming, and relying upon, who God created him to be. He says, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father.” Oh my, yes, he’s a shepherd. Why hadn’t King Saul thought to call in the all shepherds against Goliath?!? Undaunted, David continues, saying, “And whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth.” OK, so this kids got some skills. “And if it turned against me,” said David, “I would catch it by the jaw and strike it down, and kill it.” Hmm, David also shows restraint. He kills only when necessary and in self defense. David’s primary goal is protecting his flock, rescuing the lamb from the mouth of the lion and if the lion doesn’t turn on him, David lets it continue on its way. Let’s stop there for a moment.

Here’s the first of the four lessons for us: when faced with a challenge and as you rise to meet it, **be yourself**. David does not pretend to be a worrier. Instead, he uses his skills as a shepherd to achieve his goal. Be who God created you to be and use that to make progress in life. Second, David displays a sense of unshakable responsibility. David stays focused on the task and role he’s been given in life – protecting and saving his flock. **Be responsible and focused as you meet life’s challenges**. Third, David shows restraint in his actions and compassion for his challenger or adversary. **Let us be restrained and compassionate with the people in our lives**. Each of these first three character traits – being true to oneself and who God created you to be, being focused on your responsibilities and your calling in life; and having

compassion and restraint – each of these will serve you in your God-given calling in life, serve you as you rise to life's challenges, just as they served David as he rose to be king. And they will help us to develop and maintain the fourth and most important character trait David displayed. David had one thing that served him above all else – a Godly perspective. David maintained the proper perspective in life. David knew that no matter how lowly he was as a mere shepherd boy or how powerful he would become as king, David knew that God was God and David was David. He never stopped seeking to honor and serve the Lord. He never failed to turn to God, singing and dancing to the Lord in good times, and pleading and crying out to the Lord when he became lost or overwhelmed. Throughout his life, David viewed all things from the perspective of his faith in the Lord. And thus, we too, are called to ***maintain a faithful, and Godly prospective in life.*** This was David's first and most powerful gift; it's what gave rise to his kingship. David had an unwavering faith in the Lord from the get-go. He displays this faith in responding to Saul's skepticism, that David could never stand up against Goliath. For David says, "The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine." This faith in God is what allowed David to have unshakable confidence, even in the face of overwhelming odds and cruel, disheartening criticism. David knew that if he stayed true to himself, used the talents and skills that God had given him, and stayed focused on honoring and serving God alone, he could not and would not fail. Facing down Goliath: from that moment on, David knew that God would guide him and protect him. David knew that God would bring him victory and success in life. David knew that despite any struggle or defeat he might encounter, God would raise him up.

And so it is for us. We, as children of God, as followers of Christ can be assured that God will bring us success in the face of life's opportunities and challenges; that God will protect us when faced with fear and danger; and that God will raise us up to the level of our faith and trust in the Lord. All these things, God promises us, as long as we, like David, stay true to who God created us to be; as long as we, like David, as long as you continually seek, in all that you do, to honor God and serve the Lord. Amen.

### **PASTORAL PRAYER**

Holy God, even the great among us are merely human. We give thanks that you have taught us what it means to be truly human by sending your Son among us, by taking on flesh and dwelling as one with us. We give thanks that our humanity is no longer a burden to be borne, but a blessing and an opportunity. You have delivered us, O God, from having to live with our sins forever, and have revealed a new and more faithful path for us to follow. And in doing so, we often feel small, and incapable of making a difference in the world. We throw up our hands in despair, overwhelmed by the size of our foes. Yet we forget that we do not act alone, that with your help, anything might be possible. Help us to remember that an act that seems insignificant, like working at or donating to a food bank, might not end world hunger, but it will help alleviate the hunger of one family. When we feed the hungry, clothe the naked and seek justice for the disenfranchised, we are small people taking shots at giants like poverty and hatred. Empower us with the Holy Spirit, arm us with your love, and guide our hands and hearts. And in the struggles we are currently facing personally, or facing as we come along side someone else with health problems, financial woes, relationship troubles – whatever the burden, Lord – help us to remember that you are the source of our strength.

Through all that we do, help us to share the strength, peace, hope and healing of the Lord with one another, just as we now share in the Lord's Prayer together, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.