

Stepping Out In Faith

1 Samuel 17:1a, 4-7, 38-40, 48-49
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First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson

As many of you know, I'm a second-career pastor, really third-career. This means I had other jobs before becoming a pastor. In college, it was a choice between psychology and journalism. I liked psychology, but with journalism, I knew I could make a living.

So, I set aside my interest in psychology and spent eight years as a newspaper report and editor. And while I did well, it became too much about sensationalism over truth and integrity.

So, I set down my editor's hat and switched to public relations, promoting the service organizations I worked for. I did well there, too, but eventually felt called to integrate my spiritual life with my professional life.

So, I stepped away from the corporate world and ventured into faith-based workshops and seminars, blending my writing skills with corporate communications and my heart for Jesus. Still, something was missing. I felt called to more structure, something that would tap into my leadership skills. At the encouragement of my church, I went to seminary and became a pastor.

And thus, I found my true calling, something that uses all my skills and my heart for Jesus, caring for others while leading and serving this church.

Yet, I would never have gotten here had I not been willing to try new things, to keep what worked and set aside what didn't, to step out in faith wherever the Lord would lead.

In today's Old Testament lesson, we encounter David at a key turning point on his path from shepherd boy to king. King Saul – the king before David – has done a good job protecting and serving the people of Israel. But his heart isn't really with the Lord.

No, another leader must emerge from the people of Israel, and God has his eye set on David.

Have you ever wondered if God has his eye set on you, for a special calling or a new stage in life? Maybe you find yourself at a turning point – retirement, marriage, health transitions – either for yourself or a loved one -, a change in your work or financial situation. Or perhaps you remember such a key turning point in your life.

Often at such times we feel ill-equipped to find our way forward, to do what's needed.

This is where King Saul found himself as he and all of Israel were cowering before the Philistine armies, certain they could not find their way forward in this overwhelming moment in life.

Still, they must try, the king must do something. So he calls for a champion to step forward, a soldier to meet the mighty Goliath in battle. None is willing.

After all, 1st Samuel tells us that Goliath's height was six cubits and a span, which would make him nearly eight feet tall. He wore an enormous bronze helmet and massive coat of armor. And the spearhead of his javelin weighed 15 pounds. Goliath was built for battle.

David, on the other hand, had a boyish face with ruddy complexion. As a shepherd, he was lean and not nearly as muscular. He had no spear or armor. But he did have something all of Israel was lacking – an unwavering trust in God and a willingness to follow where the Lord would lead.

So David steps forward as King Saul's only hope. To prepare him for the challenge ahead, Saul gives David his armor and sword.

"David strapped Saul's sword over the armor," says 1st Samuel, "and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them." David was not Saul.

We can't pretend to be something we're not when facing life's challenges. We can't do things the way others do, particularly if it's not true to who we are. And we can't be limited to our perception of what's possible. Not when we follow and serve a God through whom all things are possible.

Knowing this, David puts aside the king's armor and sword. He picks up his shepherd's staff, chooses five smooth stones, puts them in his shoulder bag, and walks out to meet Goliath, with a slingshot in his hand!

His staff, his bag of stones, and his slingshot – these are what David knows so well. With these and these alone, God has equipped David to protect the sheep under his care.

Isn't it amazing that this is the moment God chooses to show David and all the world what he's capable of? Isn't it amazing that in this moment, David stays true to his self, confident in God and how God has guided and protected him throughout his life?

So often when we are faced with huge obstacles, we feel defeated before we've even tried. We're not always confident we can handle something new. And yet, really, this shows a lack of confidence in God, a lack of faith in God to see us through. Think about that. What is God ready to help you with right now?

In facing the fight of his life, in dealing with an overwhelming confrontation, David stepped out in faith, equipped only with what God had given him – his faith in God and an unwavering trust in who God formed him to be. But is that enough for David, for us, for you?

“When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David,” 1st Samuel tells us, “David ran quickly towards the battle line to meet the Philistine. David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.”

The boy entrusted with shepherding sheep has become the man entrusted with shepherding a nation. What might God be entrusting to you? What challenges are you facing that require you simply to be who God created and formed you to be? Do you have faith in who you are; faith in God?

Look folks, regardless of our differing talents and skills, regardless of your size and strength, each of us has been equipped with a heart for Jesus, with faith in God, and this means we trust God to see us through, even when facing the toughest obstacles and challenges.

You don't have to be anyone but who you are to overcome whatever you're facing. You just have to trust in God, trust in who God made you to be, and then step out in faith, confident that God has this, and God will see you through. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Almighty God, we often feel small, incapable of doing anything that would change the world. We throw up our hands in despair, overwhelmed by the size of our challenges and struggles. How could we possibly come out the other side? Wouldn't it be better to not try at all than to fail?

And yet, we forget that we do not act alone, that with your help, all things are possible.

Help us to remember that an act that seems insignificant – like a donation to the Community Service League – might not meet everyone's need, but it will help some people, some families.

When we feed the hungry, clothe the naked and provide for the basic needs of the disenfranchised, we are small people taking shots at gigantic problems, like poverty and homelessness.

Empower us with the Holy Spirit, O Lord, arm us with your love, guide our hands and hearts as if they were yours. Help us to stand firm and tall when we encounter the Goliath-like challenges in our community, in our families, in our lives.

Help us to remember that you are the source of our strength. May we enter our battlefields with the courage and determination of David, who faced down his Goliath and came out victorious to your glory.

We lift up these and all our prayers in your glorious and powerful name, praying together as you taught us, 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.**