

“By Faith”

Sermon for 16 October 2016

Texts: Galatians 3:11-14; 1 Samuel 17:23-37 & Hebrews 11:32-12:2

Into the Valley of Elah, Israel is warring against the Philistines, David, following his father’s commandment, bears provision to his brothers and the troops. He hears the taunt of the Philistine champion for himself! *It stirs him, provokes his courage and his faith.* Goliath is a huge, skillful man of war . . . intimidatingly fierce, he dares the army of Israel to send out their man to do combat with him. The outcome of that combat would determine the outcome of the war. **All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid.** (v. 24) They said: **“Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come to defy Israel. And the king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches, and will give him his daughter and make his father’s house free in Israel.** (vv.24-25) Wow! What high stakes! Great riches, the king’s own daughter and, in case the hero died in the process of slaying the giant, I suppose, a promise to make his father’s house free—free from what? From taxes and all other obligations to the throne. Besides that David, in David’s awakened manhood, no one defies God, no one defies the people of God, no one. So David inquires further: **What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel?** Apparently, Goliath had been coming daily to taunt, shame and humiliate the **armies of the living God.** Goliath is the Philistine’s ace in the hole! He seems invincible, surely he would prevail. David erupts with outrage: **For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?** (v.26) And those around David, marking his fervor, repeated the terms of the king’s reward.

**Now Eliab his eldest brother heard when he (David) spoke to the men. And Eliab’s anger was kindled against David,** this upstart, this keeper of the sheep, this mere boy. **Why have you come down? And with whom have you left your sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle.** (v28) What fueled this anger we may never know. Perhaps it was the embarrassment that the battle was stalled because no one dared risked his fortunes against the giant—not even for the king’s reward. But more likely Eliab was jealous of David, chagrined at being bypassed by Samuel when the prophet came and anointed the youngest, least likely son of Jesse to be the next king. Eliab was more handsome, strong, tall and capable—externally the obvious, better choice! David probably senses the he could never do anything right in Eliab’s eyes because he responds with, **What have I done now? Was it not but a word?**

Yes, it was a word, a word spoken in response to other words: Goliath’s taunt, the soldiers’ assessment of the situation, the word of reward—all words *and all words, especially brave words have wings, a life of their own.* It is as if David was replying, “Look, Eliab, we are just talking things over . . . please cut me some slack!” **And he turned away from him toward another, and spoke in the same way.** (v. 30) Eventually the way David was talking, his word, and the boldness of his speech, led to his being interviewed by King Saul—they knew each other prior to this. Yes, David had served in Saul’s household, as musician (16:21 to soothe Saul’s jangled

mind) and even as armor bearer—David was, prior to this, greatly loved by Saul (16:21). But Saul became faithless (in the matter of Agag, king of the Amalekites whom he spared instead of slaying), and in his rebellions (first in not waiting for Samuel to offer sacrifice and, subsequently, in refusing to enforce the ban as God commanded) came to resent David of whom it is written: **the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward.** (1 Samuel 16:13b) When David stood before Saul, it was the faithful standing before the faithless.

We will get to David's heroic deeds in a moment, but for now we should take stock of the young man. Martin Luther wrote: "But the deeds of David must be evaluated according to the personality of David. When we understand that David was a man of faith, whose heart trusted in the Lord, we shall understand why he could do such heroic deeds." David's faith fueled David's daring; faith, even trust in God, was the engine that produced David's courage in the Valley of Elah. I remind you that: **Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.** (Hebrews 11:6) King Saul was on the way out due to his faithlessness and due to his fear of man (his armies were dispersing while he waited for Samuel to come and offer sacrifice) which faithlessness led him to disobey God and offer up sacrifice according to his plan, and not according to the plan and revealed purposes of God! (Indeed, when Abraham was faithless and had Ishmael by Sarah's handmaiden, Hagar—he instigated a hostility that continues to this day!) Indeed, faith, or the lack thereof, has been a determining factor in history from the earliest days of human life on earth until now. Faithlessness motivated the first recorded murder.

**By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.** (Hebrews 11:4)

It was the person of Abel that pleased God, and the faith of Abel, that distinguished his offerings from those of his brother Cain, the first born. While it is true that Cain brought a vegetable offering, and Abel brought the firstborn of his flock—truly a mere difference in kind, or substance—the Lord had no regard for Cain's offering **because it was faithless.** God had respect to the person prior to, and coloring his response to their acts of worship! And, just as we have noted, it guided the choice of David over Eliab by God: **we look on the exterior God looks on the heart.** (1 Samuel 16:7) Even at that point in time, when Abel sacrificed to God, we may gather that works *without faith was useless.* God is concerned more for the heart (faith) of the worshipper than He is for the choice between vegetables, or any cut of the meat!

**David's faith** obtained him favor on and off the battlefield. Saul doesn't see it. **And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth."** (verses 32-33) David's reply resonates with faith, with a trust borne up by personal experience: **"Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his**

**mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him.** (vv. 34-35) More than once, as the life of a shepherd would have it, David was able, by trusting in God, by faith, **in the Spirit of the Lord**, to meet the threat, protect his flock and to deliver even those lambs who had been seized upon by wild animals—nothing much, just a lion, or a bear, no big deal. All in the line of duty, all in a day's work. Then David extrapolates from his experience *as a shepherd* to the present situation: **36 Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God.**” That defiance would prove to be Goliath's first fatal mistake. David, on a mission for God, is fearless for his own life. He is jealous for the honor of God—no one mocks God, no one dishonors and defies Him. No one.

Well, all this is good stuff. Completely believable. So Saul, perhaps out of desperation, is persuaded. And, again, perhaps out of genuine concern for young David, he offers him a bronze helmet and a coat of mail—however God had a different idea than hand to hand combat for his servant David! Useless body armor! Useless self-reliance. David can hardly move with all that heavy protection: **“I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them.” So David put them off.** (v.39) Instead David goes with what he knows, with what he has field- tested so to speak: a staff, a sling and five smooth stones (**which he chose from the brook** (v.40). I suppose there was the element of surprise working for David, too. **And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance.** (v.42) Goliath made his second and third fatal mistakes almost simultaneously; he held David in open contempt, and then he misjudged things, noting only the exterior, or appearance of the man. Samuel's dilemma hinged on just this point: all David's elder brothers look more suitable than the youngest, externally. Do not be deceived, faith matters . . . faith matters most!

**And the Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.** His fourth mistake! This tiny detail, Goliath's pagan gods, is hugely important because the actual battle was between Goliath's gods and the God of Israel—our **jealous God** who refused to have **any other gods** before Him!. **Then the Philistine said to David, “Come to me and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field.”** (v. 44) Not so fast, big boy. David's faith-ridden and God honoring reply is worth quoting in full:

**45 Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46 This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, 47 and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand.”**

Let's extract a few elements of David's faith here for us to see. We do want to note that not all of the Lord's servants are soldiers, unless they be called to be so—the weapons in the armory that Pilgrim visits on his Pilgrim's Progress —includes tent pegs and hammers! First, David's posture: **I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts . . . Whom you have defied.** (v.45) Is there anything wrong with facing your day in just such a vein? Challenges, obstacles, difficulties at work? I come against you . . . in the name of the Lord! Spirit of oppression, fear, insecurity, I oppose you in the Name of the Lord! **This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand!** You will not overcome me, no, quite the opposite, you will succumb to the Lord and I shall have the victory through Him in Whom I have placed my trust. **I will strike you down and cut off your head.** *I grant that might seem rather drastic, and, perhaps, not exactly applicable to your working environment—but the point is, in battle, we anticipate complete victory . . . not a cease-fire or a truce. This is what makes our nation great, we believe that “All men are created equal sf that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights” and that this Creator is the God of Scripture Who is the God of David! The world is still looking to us, as set forth in our founding documents to be the champion of God, of “life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.” If we trust in that God, our God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall remain a beacon of hope and liberty for a beleaguered, oppressed and captive world. They look for our Davids to stride into the valley and do battle for our King as they did in World War I and World War II and have done heroically in conflicts more recent!*

So, we will happily pass on the dead bodies around the water cooler! Living by faith may not entail mayhem and slaughter! Although at times, as in San Bernadino, those unhappy scenes may unfold. But we will not slip past the faith motivation that should ever stir our hearts: **that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.** (v.46) We must further say, ***in His world!*** Here and now, God receives the credit and the honor and the glory, which is urging the same as **do all things to the glory of God.** And, for those who are queasy with all these grisly details of warfare and mortal combat, relish this: **the Lord saves not with the sword and the spear but through faith,** through the holy exercise of power of the Holy Spirit in faith men and women. Not all servants are soldiers, true, and not all soldiers are servants of God—but we thank God for those who are!

David believed with all his heart that God was with him and for him. He believed in the God of his anointing, in the God who called him through His servant Samuel, the God of history Who had founded Israel and established a people for Himself, the same God who had through Moses led His people out of the house of bondage, Who had fed, guided, protected the people through the Exodus experience, raining manna, and yes quail on them to sustain them all, parting seas and singlehandedly destroying the enemies of His people—the God he worshipped was the God he honored and He was God with him in countless ways. His God delivered him from real dangers, from lions and bear and wild dogs, no doubt. God was a promise keeping, ever-present source of delight and supply to David *and so, we see, that we as a pillar and buttress of the truth have David's narrative to preserve and replicate in our times as well!* **Long before the great deliverance, long before the coming of the Messiah Jesus, God was in the mix of things—doing a work of preparation, causing things to happen, evoking faith and wonder**

*generation after generation proving that whatever God is doing, He is not withdrawn, not sidelined, not passive, not disengaged and that those who trust in Him will do great and astounding things, brave, heroic and singular things*—triumphs in conflict, perseverance through affliction, sealing His Word, glorifying His Name ***in our own times and through our lives***. Now as then, and now as ever.

So, as we conclude, and ask what has this to do with me, provided that He has my heart (entirely) will I believe that He also has my back? Will I go forth, listen to hear what is actually going down, and, seeing where His reputation is stake, or His honor is being disgraced (even His existence being defied and denied) and propel my from “this is what I believe” to “Lord, here am I, send me. Yes, David trusted God so God did great things through David. What if God has something like that in mind for you and me? Will we go, armed with what we know, what we have mastered, what we *already* possess (our staff, and sling, our pouch and stones) to take down the adversary who laughs at God, and mocks Him—cursing in the name of his gods? Shall we cower before atheists, secularists, humanists?! Retreat from them? Down with delusion, self-worship, all the tiny deities of our day! Who cares if they have graduated from the Ivy League? Or even hold teaching positions in prestigious schools? Just because some are having a banquet in the grave, does not mean we should join join them in their futility and despair—let us arise and descend into the Valley of Netal with open eyes and ears, to pick up the purpose that our King created us for. Let us back-up, support and provision those engaged in the battle just as David did.

For we do know **If God be for us, who can stand against? The battle belongs to the Lord and no weapon formed against us shall prosper—let them be as stones to fill your sling with**, as lethal projectiles capable of taking your enemies out. Our enemy does not want us to believe these things. Never think of these merely as inspirational verses, or just vital words of encouragement, or pretty phrases found somewhere in the Bible—If hand to hand combat is not necessitated, *victory will come some other way* just as it did for David. Imagine David's pay back for all that stone throwing practice! Imagine God planting your knock out stone in the offending forehead of the giant your fear, rendering your adversary incapable of keeping head and shoulders together..The hall of fame of faith is not yet full. Your contribution is awaited. Will you be one of those **who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life?** (Hebrews 11:33-35) Yes, what will you do *that God has for you alone to do by faith*, and expend all yourself to the glory of God? And if not now, when? Could God be saying, today, “Whom shall I send?” Or who is ready now to answer, “Here am I, send me.”

**Amen**