

Kids Stump the Preacher: Little David and the Big Big Bully

April 25, 2021

Bendersville & Wenksville United Methodist Churches

1 Samuel 17:1-9, 32-37

So today we are continuing our journey through stories in the Bible that have been carefully and lovingly selected by our youngest and brightest folks – the kids in the church. And we've titled this series "Kids Stump the Preacher" – because, as I have been made painfully aware when working through these stories, most of them are stories that I know well; that I have read or told to my own kids countless times through the years; as a child of God I've engaged with them; as a mom I've engaged with them...but as a pastor, a lot of them I have never taken the time to really delve into. Like today's story. David and Goliath. It goes alongside Noah's Ark and Daniel in the Lion's Den as one of those great, fabulous, image-rich stories that we tell our kids over and over and over again, but then...in some manner...we just leave it there. As a kid's story. And as we grow up into adulthood, we just sort-of tend to leave it behind us, never really taking the time to consider that maybe these quote-unquote "kids' stories" have every bit as much to teach us as adults as they have to teach the kids.

I was really surprised one day when I ordered a new book, sight-unseen off of Amazon for Julia. It has become one of our all-time most favorite favorite bedtime story books titled *Once Upon a Time, The End: Asleep in 60 Seconds*. And the premise of the book is that there is an exhausted dad who is trying to put his kid to bed at night, but his kid wants one more story. And then another story. And another. And another. And because the dad is exhausted and just wants to go to bed himself, he starts cutting out words from the stories. Or pages. Or major sections, just to get through them faster. (Parents, any of you want to admit ever having done this?)

And so this book is full of all kinds of favorite kids' stories and Nursery Rhymes: Goldilocks and the Three Bears (except in this story, it doesn't really matter how many bears there were. What mattered was that when Goldilocks woke up and saw the bears staring at her, she ran home to sleep in her own bed). The Princess and the Pea. (Are there Peas in your bed? No? Then what's your excuse? Go to sleep.)

*There was an old lady who lived in a shoe.
She had so many kids, she didn't know what to do.
Stories were read until her face turned blue.
When kids wouldn't go to bed, she sold them to the zoo.*

And then...among all of these classic children's stories and nursery rhymes, what do we have but the story of David and Goliath – thrown in there among the princesses and the dragons and the fairy tales.

Goliath was a giant soldier with a sword.

*David was a shepherd boy with a slingshot.
The two had a fight one night over who would be king.
David took careful aim with a stone
And knocked Goliath smack in the head.
The giant fell into a great heap.
He looked like he was asleep.
The end.*

I have to laugh a little bit, because in this story that goes on for all of chapter 17 of 1 Samuel – which is not a short chapter (it goes on for 58 verses and I have to admit to cutting quite a few verses out of our reading this morning for the sake of time), but this exhausted dad did hero's work. Cutting a 58-verse story down to just 57 words, and hitting all of the major themes. Big Goliath with a sword. Little David with a slingshot. A well-aimed stone. Bam. Goliath goes down. That's the crux of the story in a nutshell. Now, time for bed.

Except that there is maybe a teensy bit more to it than that.

There was an article published in a medical journal a few years ago – in 2014 – that takes a look at the story of David and Goliath – particularly Goliath – through a medical lens. And it is fascinating. Now, I am no doctor. So those of you with a medical background, bear with me here.

There is a certain genetic disorder, in which the pituitary gland develops an adenoma – a non-cancerous tumor – usually pretty early in life. And this tumor wreaks all kinds of havoc on the system.

- The adenoma secretes a growth hormone, which could cause the person to grow way too fast, and to look enormous. We are told that Goliath measured 6 cubits tall – or about 9 feet tall. And the medical literature out there suggests that yes – medically, this would very much be possible for someone with this condition.
- But at the same time, while this person might look big and impressive, generally people with this condition don't have the strength or speed or agility to match their outward appearance. They are not nearly as strong or as fast as they look.
- Often, the tumor will press against the optic nerve and cause visual disturbances – especially in the person's peripheral vision. So they will have a hard time seeing at all, but especially things that are happening off to the side.
- And then, there are some really weird, random things that sometimes go on. Often, people with this condition will develop hyperthyroidism, causing a goiter, or a lump in the neck, caused by an enlarged thyroid.
- And on very rare occasions, one of the genes can further mutate, causing the person to grow extra fingers, or extra toes.

In the case of Goliath, we know that he comes from a family of giants. We don't know much about his parents, but we know that he had at least one brother who was also a

giant, and a sister who was not. We know that he had three sons, all of whom were giants.

We know that there were families of giants that went back a long time throughout scripture. In the book of Numbers, when the Israelite spies were first scoping out the land of Canaan before God led Israel out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land, one of the biggest complaints that the spies came back with was that Canaan was filled with giants. "We were like grasshoppers next to them!"

These giants were later named the "Anakim," or the "descendants of Anaq." So, this is really kind of interesting here – Anaq was the name of one of the very first giants we ever hear about in scripture. And his name – the Hebrew word *Anaq* literally translates as "giant," but also as "neck" or "necklace" or even...wait for it..."goiter."

Another interesting little tidbit...we think that Goliath had three sons. We know the names of two of them: Ishbi-Benob and Saph (or Sippai). The third one, we never get to know his name, but we hear about him way down the road, both in the books of 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles. And there are two things about him that are particularly intimidating. First, he is a giant. And second, it seems almost like he is superhuman because he has six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. So it seems that Goliath's son has that weird genetic mutation.

That doesn't really have much of anything to do with what we are talking about...I just think this bizarre medical/genetic stuff is cool. Excuse me while I geek out for a minute.

So...back to the story of *David* and Goliath. This is a story that is all about things not being at all what they seem. About the insides being a lot more important than the outward appearance. The inner workings of our hearts and our souls being far more important than our external appearance.

So on one hand, we have Goliath. The giant. The man who the Philistines are delighted to have in their army just purely for the intimidation factor. Put 9-foot tall Goliath out front and have him holler "who will fight me" and all of the little grasshopper-sized people will run for cover, terrified. Goliath would never even have to fight. His looks were enough to win the Philistines pretty much any battle. Their enemies would surrender at the first sight of this big warrior-hero.

And in the case of Israel, that's almost what happened. All of the biggest, strongest, most intimidating Israelite warriors basically held up the white flag and said "we give up. You win."

And then, we have David. David was so little, and so unimposing, and so unassuming that he wasn't even invited to the Town Hall meeting to *discuss* Goliath. If King Saul was in a bad mood and they needed somebody to calm him down by playing soothing music for him, David was their guy. But when giants are threatening Israel's borders – this was

a job for the grown-ups. And the grown-ups didn't need little shepherd boys yammering in the background offering unhelpful solutions to a problem that was too big for any of them.

Problem was, even the strongest and the mightiest Israelite warriors were running for cover. And who did that leave, but little tiny David who, despite his little stature, seemed to have zero fear.

King Saul tried to be helpful. He knew David didn't stand a chance, but if he maybe gave David the king's armor David might at least *look* more impressive. But David was so tiny that Saul's armor just swallowed him up and he couldn't move. So with no protective gear and armed with nothing more than a slingshot and five little stones from the river, little bitty David marched out to the battlefield to fight the giant who was probably at least twice as big as he was.

And here's where this story gets really fun, and we discover that this fight is really *not* a fair fight. The odds are stacked. But they are not stacked against David. They are stacked against Goliath and the Philistines.

First and foremost, David has God on his side. So from the very beginning, there is no way whatsoever that David is going to lose this battle.

But there is also everything else going on underneath – things that God knows, but things that nobody else can see. Things that turn things around for both Israel and the Philistines.

First: Remember that even though giants may have been big and intimidating, they were not nearly as strong as they looked. The Philistines were relying *totally and completely* on *optics* to win their battle. What did Goliath the warrior *look* like. Not how effectively could he fight. So to play up the intimidation factor, they loaded Goliath down with an enormous amount of gigantic and powerful armor, that our scripture goes into painstaking detail to play up. Basically, the same thing King Saul tried to do to David. David was just too smart to use it. It is likely that Goliath's body armor alone weighed about 125 lb, not counting his helmet or sword or shield. The reader assumes that because Goliath is big he can handle the weight. But the reality is, he wasn't strong enough to handle it. And he wasn't fast or agile, even without the extra weight. With that much weight weighing him down, he looked impressive but he couldn't move. It was pretty much all he could do just to stand there and yell insults at David.

Meanwhile, David had *shed* his armor. He had the same problem – Saul's armor was too much for him. But he realized that if he couldn't move, he couldn't fight. And his strength lay not in what he looked like, but how he could maneuver around the battlefield.

Second, we have the matter of Goliath's eyesight. He was probably nearsighted and he had almost no peripheral vision. He was too weighted down to dodge incoming projectiles, even if he *could* see them, which he couldn't. So basically, as long as David came in from the side, Goliath was a sitting duck.

Add to that, that David was *very* practiced with a slingshot. It may not have looked impressive, but that was his weapon of choice when fighting off wild animals that were far more dangerous than this giant of a man. David had five stones with him, but that was overkill. He only needed one. One well-aimed rock from outside the giant's field of vision, and the Philistines' whole charade would come tumbling down.

It maybe sounds a little trite to say that it is what's on the inside that counts. That's what we tell kids when they come home in tears because of something that somebody said about they way they look. But the truth is, I think that somewhere along the line we as adults tend to forget that lesson. That our strength is not in what we look like or how smoothly we talk or how shiny our armor is or how well we protect and guard ourselves. Our strength doesn't lie in caving to other people's perceptions of what we *should* look like or what other people look like – because this armor just weighs us down and gets in the way of our ability to do what God is truly calling us – uniquely – to do. Our strength doesn't lie in how *big* we are. I've heard a lot of folks lately expressing a lot of anxiety about our churches, and how we are going to survive down the road if we don't pick up more people – and fast. And the pastor in me feels this along with you. But the truth of the gospel is that size doesn't matter nearly as much as heart. Our true strength lies in recognizing what gifts God has uniquely given *us*. And then showing up, fully ourselves so that God can use the way that he uniquely created us to make the world a better place. To build God's kingdom on earth.

And when we do this – when we offer what little we have to be used by God – our tiny little slingshot and our five smooth stones – and when we present ourselves, fully ourselves, to God, then there is no way we can lose. God will take our tiny little offering; our tiny little faith community; our tiny yet mighty faith and resolve – and work miracles with it.