

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy Loving God, you love us eternally, gracious parent. You lead us in the way we should go like an ever-present father; you care for us like an eternal mother. Today we celebrate the examples of loving fathers this day devoted to such love. We lift up their example and praise you in the midst of the goodness. Nevertheless, God, we are mindful of those who cannot celebrate this day. Those who have broken relationships, those who lost a father, those who never knew a father, those whose father did not exemplify love, those who will never have the chance to be a father, we are mindful of in our celebrations. We rejoice with the examples we wish to lift up and we lift up those who do not have the examples we rejoice. God, in our joys and in our tears, you are the God who holds us and nurtures us along the way. In our laughter and our tears, though, help us to lean upon you when the world is difficult. God, we hear the timeless story of David and Goliath, and we know it is more than just the story of an underdog winning. It is the story of trust that goes from a feeling to a way of life. God, when the world seeks easy trust while sitting back, you call us to trust that moves us and that gets our hands dirty when no one else will. Open our ears and our eyes, God, to the ways in which we can move in harmony with your calling with the gifts you have given us along the way. We pray all these things in the name of the one who calls us to trust with action, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray in one voice...

## SERMON

We hear about it all the time. This is the first and best story of the underdog triumphing over the favorite. Be it the classic mix-up of “Dewey Defeats Truman” or the 1980 Olympic Hockey “Miracle on Ice” or the 2010 NFL Playoff Season where the 6<sup>th</sup> Seed (and evil) Green Bay Packers beat everyone on the way to the championship, the way they

will always be described is “David Beats Goliath.” Even if you know nothing about scripture, you know this is the eternal underdog. But this is not God’s way of setting out the example of the underdog triumphant over the favorite. That’s just the simplest and most often referenced interpretation. The point of this passage has gotten lost in the midst of so many cultural references along the way. It’s the story of an underdog, but that’s not the ultimate point. This underdog has a lot more than a scrappy can-do attitude. This underdog knows that power has a lot more to it than an oversized man who taunts with more weapons than he knows what to do with. This is a story about trust well placed in the Creator and what trust truly means. Sometimes we need to go and do in the name of God when it would seem inconvenient to illogical. When we give into our own desires and mentality, we give into fear, where trust is not possible. When we focus on God and trust in God, we walk into the places where we can truly do God’s work. Let us see this underdog story from new eyes and recognize that real trust is the true underdog.

This is one of the classic stories of the Bible. The battle lines were drawn, each army of the Philistines and the Israelites near one mountain with a valley in between. A giant steps forward, a Philistine warrior named Goliath. He starts taunting, as he is quite confident in his own abilities. “Choose a man for yourself and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you will be our servants and serve us.” The crowd of Israelite warriors was afraid. They were literally quivering in their boots. Then came David, who is just trying to bring grain to the troops, including his brothers, on the front lines, and he hears Goliath’s taunt. David comes to King Saul and announced that he will take the challenge, despite King Saul telling him he is too small. Eventually, Saul gave him his blessing.

David stepped up to the plate and faced his foe. Goliath distained him and cursed him, but David announced that he came with the power of God, contrary to all Goliath's weapons. Thus begins the faceoff between the young upstart shepherd David and the great Philistine warrior Goliath, who literally stands head and shoulders above everyone else. The young David had just been anointed as the next King of Israel over the sitting King Saul, and now he defends the name of God. Goliath moved forward with all of the armament, all of the state of the art weapons his great frame could handle, and the boy David came at him with a heart trusting, a sling, and a stone, and with them he conquered the great warrior.

I'm just going to take a seat right now and ask Jeff to finish my sermon. I trust in God that the sermon will get done exactly the way that I prepared it, and that I don't have to do anything about it. No, I didn't tell him about it, but I trust that will just happen as it should. I have faith in you. Now, get to work. But we all know that's not the way that trust works. That's not the way that faith works. Then why do we automatically think that's the way God works? If we sit back and think that all will be well by saying "here, God, you take this one," we aren't following God; we're waiting for God to work. But that's not exclusively how God works in our lives. God empowers us to work for God. That's the point of this passage. Trust and faith require a movement, working in order for trust and faith to be made whole. I can't just tell Jeff to take my job when, as a layperson and member of Faith, he empowers me to preach the word of God. God leads us to take the reigns with God as the force and fuel behind us

It's a lot like love. If you know someone loves you but they haven't done anything to show you about it, then it's not really love. It's just a nice feeling that is rather bankrupt. The heart is found in verse 37, as David told Saul that in his time as a shepherd, he had to

chase away many a predator: “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.” The point, according to the podcast Sermon Brainwave, is that a man his size had no business beating those wild animals, but with God’s guidance, his willing heart, and him moving into the fray, he could. His trust had hands and feet; his trust was focused in faith, and he did what he needed to when things seemed at their most dire. I would imagine that many of the soldiers camped along the battle line had faith in God, but when things got rough and scary, they couldn’t do anything. Faith and trust fail when fear takes over, and nothing happens. We inadvertently throw into God’s face what God is directing us to do and to be because we think only about ourselves.

A couple of weeks back, we discussed the message of Jesus that “A House divided cannot stand.” The people who thought Jesus was the head of the demons weren’t acting out of dislike of Jesus so much as they were acting out of fear for the new thing he was doing among them, something unfamiliar and, therefore, scary. The same idea can be discussed here. Saul is supposed to be leading the charge, but he is held back. He is slowly deteriorating, not just as a man but as a leader, according to the New Interpreter’s Commentary. The underlying premise that holds the people back isn’t just a lack of faith but a lack of faith prompted by fear. Indeed, scripture says, “When Saul and all Israel heard (the words of Goliath), they were dismayed and greatly afraid.” They looked at what they were facing and they looked at themselves and what they thought they could do. Put that into an easy math problem, and things don’t seem to add up. So, they did nothing. That dismay, that fear prevented them from moving because the task became about them instead of for God. Well, there goes trust in God, and when trust in God goes out the

window, we are paralyzed with fear. When fear gets ahold of us, we lose all common sense and give into a continually spiraling sense of how everything is going to go wrong. Fear prompts us to hold onto control even more when trust in God calls us to let go of more. Fear makes the situation about us and our wants instead of how we work for God's purposes, and it is more subtle than we want to realize.

Fear is the greatest enemy of God's purposes because it transforms trust in God into the desire for greater control. It also disguises itself so very well. When I was at Annual Conference, I heard a lot of discussions about hard topics. One of them was the re-envisioning of moving the Rocky Mountain Conference and Yellowstone into a new conference with a combined ministry. It began with a letter from the Bishop that I read several months ago, and the discussion has grown throughout both conferences. It was presented for contemplation at this year's conference. Some voices were willing to see what God may have in store for both conferences in a new structure. Some voices raised a lot of negativity without offering something productive. On the other hand, some raised some issues that didn't really amount to anything for God's ministry. I'm all for those who want to raise possible issues, but when we do it without raising something productive in return, that's not feedback; that's complaining. And the root of the complaining is not that we have practical reasons why this cannot work; it is nothing less than fear masked as logic. It's a very human thing to do, but that is not humanity with a full trust in God. Indeed, whenever there is something new, often our first emotion is fear because change is scary. But we don't call it what it is; we clothe it with something else because fear is something difficult to encounter. We do it unconsciously, but it's not about the issue at hand; it's about the change. The conference will be too big geographically; we may have

travel issues; they may not think the way we do. The Philistine Warrior is just too big, and we cannot conquer him. When we get down to it, that's not trusting God; that's putting God in a box. It's nothing less than fear wearing the clothes of logic. God has no room to get in, and God's ministry is negated along the way. Perhaps this is a way that God is showing us how to trust like David. Maybe the conference will be too big geographically, but I think God's just a bit bigger than that. God is always doing something new, and it often comes through places we may not consider the most convenient.

We are called to be people who trust in God, but there's a lot more to it than a simple mental understanding. True trust in God leads us somewhere. We are more importantly people who are called to move with our trust in God. We could easily say that many of the people in the Israelite army trusted in God mentally, but when action was called for, no one stepped up to the plate because their trust wasn't rooted very deeply. Their trust was easy because times were easy. When times get hard, that trust can falter, and difficulties become bigger than they are. Only one person showed that faithful trust, and through his faithfulness and his actions, God was glorified, as God was there all along. Now, we aren't necessarily called into battle today with someone twice our size for the glory of God, but the same wisdom holds true. God's ways call us to move however we are called to accomplish God's purposes. Sometimes things will look bigger than they actually are, and we can easily give into fear. Fear will prevent us from acting and will create the story that this is what God wants when it's truly about what we want. Fear will lead us to complaining and nitpicking around what we want, and we can't. Fear will divide us because our eyes are on the problems instead of the one who holds us through all things. Trust may

not lead us to everything being absolutely the way we want it, but we will be firmly anchored through the waves.

So, you won't be called to take down a giant for God literally. But when you look at it, fear is quite the giant, and when we look at the giant of fear, we take our eyes off God and put our eyes squarely on ourselves and our desires. We become so focused on maintaining our veneer of safety that it becomes Trust in God falls apart, and we have to grip harder; we have to maintain our own personal sense of control. God has no room to come in and work within us. But when we have a deeply rooted trust, God is there to direct us to faithfulness all along the way. Thanks be to God for the underdog, the underdog of trust, that is not always easy to find but one that, no matter what the world says, wins the day. Amen and amen!