

Call to Worship

As we begin our worship these words are for thinking: 'In the blue corner... weighing in at 300 pounds, the mighty... the chiselled... the heavyweight champion... superhuman... powerful warrior from Gath... it's GO-LIATH!

And in the red corner... the young pretender... not even featherweight... the unknown... he of beautiful appearance... the shepherd boy of Bethlehem... it's DA-VID!

An unfair contest! An unfair fight. Yet, with God strange things happen. Who God chooses is up to God. And when God makes a choice, that person has what God needs for the outcome God intends.

As God's chosen people let us worship God and remain alert and ready for what God needs from us!'

Hymn CH4 124 – Praise to the Lord, the almighty,

Prayer of Adoration & Praise

We clear our heads, we still our hearts and we come before God in prayer, let us pray.

We come, loving God, separated in place and time, but united always in your grace.

We come, loving God, to seek here: truth in your Word. We come, loving God, to express here: the care you have for all creation.

We come to listen: in the midst of our fear, our confusion, our doubt, We come to listen: in the midst of our joy, our wondering, our hopefulness.

We come to listen: to the Good News, the message of peace, the promise of justice, the surety of your compassion.

In this time, in this place, wherever we are, whoever we are, whatever we are, we come to listen for your voice speaking through the ages, the seasons, the scriptures, and your people.

With minds, hearts, eyes and ears, open to the wonder of your presence, help us now to listen for the coming of your Kingdom and the promise of a new life in your love.

For all this we ask in Jesus' name, who taught us when we pray together to say; Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others that sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Theme Introduction: 'Overcoming Giants'

Reading: 1 Samuel 17: 32 – 49

³² David said to Saul, "Your Majesty, no one should be afraid of this Philistine! I will go and fight him."

³³ "No," answered Saul. "How could you fight him? You're just a boy, and he has been a soldier all his life!"

³⁴ "Your Majesty," David said, "I take care of my father's sheep. Any time a lion or a bear carries off a lamb, ³⁵ I go after it, attack it, and rescue the lamb. And if the lion or bear turns on me, I grab it by the throat and beat it to death. ³⁶ I have killed lions and bears, and I will do the same to this heathen Philistine, who has defied the army of the living God. ³⁷ The Lord has saved me from lions and bears; he will save me from this Philistine."

"All right," Saul answered. "Go, and the Lord be with you." ³⁸ He gave his own armour to David for him to wear: a bronze helmet, which he put on David's head, and a coat of armour. ³⁹ David strapped Saul's sword over the armour and tried

to walk, but he couldn't, because he wasn't used to wearing them. "I can't fight with all this," he said to Saul. "I'm not used to it." So he took it all off. ⁴⁰ He took his shepherd's stick and then picked up five smooth stones from the stream and put them in his bag. With his sling ready, he went out to meet Goliath.

David Defeats Goliath

⁴¹ The Philistine started walking toward David, with his shield bearer walking in front of him. He kept coming closer, ⁴² and when he got a good look at David, he was filled with scorn for him because he was just a nice, good-looking boy. ⁴³ He said to David, "What's that stick for? Do you think I'm a dog?" And he called down curses from his god on David. ⁴⁴ "Come on," he challenged David, "and I will give your body to the birds and animals to eat."

⁴⁵ David answered, "You are coming against me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the Israelite armies, which you have defied. ⁴⁶ This very day the Lord will put you in my power; I will defeat you and cut off your head. And I will give the bodies of the Philistine soldiers to the birds and animals to eat. Then the whole world will know that Israel has a God, ⁴⁷ and everyone here will see that the Lord does not need swords or spears to save his people. He is victorious in battle, and he will put all of you in our power."

⁴⁸ Goliath started walking toward David again, and David ran quickly toward the Philistine battle line to fight him. ⁴⁹ He reached into his bag and took out a stone, which he slung at Goliath. It hit him on the forehead and broke his skull, and Goliath fell face downward on the ground.

Hymn CH4 513 – Courage, brother! do not stumble,

Sermon – ‘David’s Initiative’

He is far bigger, far taller than people said he was and now he is standing in front of them all spouting off at them at the top of his voice. He is challenging their identity, their security, and wellbeing. He is threatening to dominate and eliminate them.

As he shouts, David heard Goliath, a champion, a Philistine, a giant of a man. Standing at nearly ten feet tall. Wearing upper body armour, weighing 125 pounds. The head of his spear alone added another 15 pounds in weight.

Yet, have you ever wondered if David heard more than just Goliath’s words. Saul and the Israelite army heard the same words and were terrified. What did David hear that would cause him to say, *‘no one should be afraid’*. What was it that caused David to stand up to Goliath? Maybe, David was listening with the ears of his heart. Maybe he heard a call upon his life. Maybe, David heard something about this situation that touched his humanity and connected him to something beyond himself.

I wonder if that has ever happened for you? What are the ‘giants’ in your life that threaten and challenge? When have you encountered a Philistine champion? For they are as real today as they were in David’s day.

Have you ever felt overwhelmed and overpowered by circumstances? As if you were up against something bigger and stronger than you? What was that giant? Have you ever felt that you were just not up to what was being asked of you and, as a result, you felt small and inadequate? What was Goliath saying to you?

For, we all, at some point in our lives, face Philistines, face giants. Sometimes, it is personal and unique to our situation. Goliath might be illness, loneliness, the loss of a loved one. Maybe a rift in a relationship. Or maybe it feels as if your life is moving out of your control, and you are powerless to do anything to stop it. At other times Goliath might be more systemic. It is the kidnapping of school children, violence throughout the world, civil war in various countries, racism, food poverty, COVID-19. Goliath shows up in lots of ways.

Every time Goliath shows up – the battle lines are drawn. Yet, the battle is not, however, what we often think it is. For some, today's battle lines could be seen as being pro-vaccination vs anti-vaccination, pro-independence vs pro-union. Sometimes we name the battle lines as between Evangelicals and Revisionists, between born here and not born here, between the United Kingdom and the European Union, between us and them, between you and me.

However, none of those, are the primary battle of the day. These are manifestations of a deeper and more consequential battle. The primary battle is the one for the heart. The battle for my heart, your heart, and the heart of humanity. This is the battle to determine who we are, how we want to live, and who we will serve. That is the wager that Goliath threw down to David. That is the battle line to which David stepped up.

For every time Goliath steps up to battle, he comes with weapons. He comes with brute strength and force. He came to David with spear, sword, and javelin. Today it might be guns, bombs, tanks, and cannons. Yet, military might, and power are not the only weapons. Intimidation and discrimination are weapons. So are rhetoric and ideology. Policy and law can also be used as weapons to hurt others. Maybe, the most dangerous of weapons, is a closed mind and a hard heart. The weapons Goliath carries are many and varied.

In the face of a giant like Goliath, the temptation will be to respond in kind. To arm ourselves, weapon for weapon. We think we should have at least the same strength weapon or, better yet, something more powerful. Even Saul believed that David should meet Goliath on Goliath's terms. Saul dresses David in his armour: a helmet, a coat of mail, a sword. What does David do? He takes it all off. Why? Well, he is not used to it. It does not fit him. This is not who David is. Which leads me to wonder if that is who we have become? Have we become so used to arming ourselves, that it is our first thought? Would this be Jesus' first thought? Is arming ourselves the only way?

I think David teaches us something in this moment. He removes everything Saul has placed on him and steps up to battle in the name of his God. To come in the name of the Lord is not about reinforcing our position, our politics, our

ideologies, or our authority with some sort of 'divine power'. It is most certainly not about 'co-opting' God onto our 'side'. When we come in God's name surely, our position should be one of service. Service to the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and anyone else in need.

When you read the Gospels, who did Jesus spend time with? What got Jesus into trouble? It was not because He was spending most of His time with the rich, the powerful, the beautiful or the acceptable. Jesus spent His time and energy on the poor, the oppressed, the suffering, the needy. He was more likely to be found bending down to help the outcast or eating supper with tax collectors and prostitutes. Jesus touched the untouchables. He found more faith in foreigners than Israelites.

Therefore, if we were to draw up for battle in the name of the Lord, we must be willing to reclaim our own hearts, to hold the values Jesus holds, to be peacemakers. It means we must see, not ignore, the poor, the hungry and those who weep as blessed and deserving of God's attention. It means we must work for justice. We must strive for all human beings to be treated equally. We should offer compassion instead of indifference. We must love our neighbour, our enemy, and the stranger. We must also open our arms and soften our hearts to one another.

So, who's name will you want to stand in today, Goliath's or God's? I want to stand in the name of the Lord. I want to be like David. Do you? Do you not want to bring the name of the Lord into the difficulties and complexities of life? I want to reclaim the heart of humanity. I want to stand in the name of the Lord for what is godly and God-like. I want to speak for and defend the dignity of every human being. The words of Jesus, ringing in my ears: *'love the Lord your God, with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and love your neighbour as you love yourself.'* Sometimes I do this – sometimes I am David.

Yet, there have also been other times, when I have come to the battle, not as Davud but as Goliath. I become a Philistine in someone else's life, a giant who wants to dominate, overpower, even eliminate. I weaponize myself and act out of fear, anger, and frustration.

The battle between David and Goliath, is not just a Bible story or an event in history. It is the human story. My story and yours. It is a reality within each one of us. I suspect you know that battle and, just like me, can name the times when you have been David and the times you have been Goliath. It is a choice we make every day. When we wake up tomorrow morning will we be David, or will we be Goliath?

Whichever way this choice is made, the battle line has been drawn. It is a line which runs through and divides our heart. It is a line which divides and separates us from one another. It is a line which divides and separates us from God and the way of Jesus.

If we cannot win this battle within us, we will continue to project it onto the world and the lives of others. No doubt there will be casualties, them, and us. No one will win. This is not about where we are on a political spectrum. It is about where we are on the David and Goliath spectrum. Where we stand on the issues of the day does not matter nearly as much as whether we stand in the name of the Lord.

So, I wonder, how is your battle going? Who are you bringing to the battle line? Will we see your 'David' or your 'Goliath'? What would it take for you to bring more of David? What would it look like for you to follow David's initiative and stand in the name of the Lord?

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn CH4 189 – Be still, for the presence of the Lord,

Prayer for Ourselves and Others

We unite our hearts again in prayer, let us pray.

Almighty, loving God, in compassion you sent your Son to shine his light into the darkness of our lives and of our world, to guide us toward a new life and a new perspective.

This day as we seek that light, we ask for your blessing on this troubled planet, in the midst of pain and disease, still suffering under the impacts of climate change, we pray for change in the hearts and minds of each of us that we might see again the glory of your creation, and our duty to protect it.

This day as we seek that light, we ask for your blessing on our community, this parish, this area, as it too seeks to find a way forward into an uncertain future, we pray for change in the way we interact with each other, that we might see the good that is all around us.

This day as we seek that light, we ask for your blessing on your Church, here in this place and all across the world online and in person, as we seek to do your work and love your people we pray that new perspectives will be heard, that we will change and grow and maintain what is valuable.

This day as we seek that light, we ask for your blessing on each of us gathered today separated in space but united in worship of you, as we look for the wisdom and boldness to listen to you beloved son we pray that that your love will be known to each of us and all those that we meet, help us to find the glory in our everyday lives and share it with a world so in need of your voice. Amen.

Hymn CH4 535 – Who would true valour see,

Benediction

The God who championed shepherd boys in the face of mighty warriors, the God of surprises, the God of the least likely, the last-chancers, and the underdogs, blesses you and challenges you, inspires and encourages you, astonishes and delights you. So, may the Blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Spirit rest upon you and all whom you love this day and always. Amen.