FIVE SMOOTH STONES

[1 Samuel 17](http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=142931586) and Mark 4:35-41

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I thought I was going to preach on the gospel today about sleeping Jesus in the boat, during the raging storm. But I realized I’ve preached on Mark’s gospel text for today – at least a half-a-dozen times, dissecting it every which way from Sunday; and although most of us know this story of David and Goliath; probably because it’s in all 3 Jewish, Christian and Muslim scriptures; and even deep into our contemporary movies and arts; I have never preached on 1 Samuel 17 before! So, kind of late in my Sunday planning, I switched gears, and I am going to talk about a different kind of storm.

The storms name is Goliath. Goliath, the Philistine, was big, beefy belligerent giant of a man, if you can imagine him; standing 10 feet tall in his stocking feet, with what must have been a size 20 collar; a 9'12-inch hat size, and a 52-inch belt. When he put on his full armor, he must have looked something like a Sherman tank. Now, David on the other hand, was just a boy, a shepherd boy, from Bethlehem, who steps out of obscurity, waves aside the clumsy armor that King Saul offered him, and, takes just 5 smooth stones - and a slingshot, and surprisingly, leaves Goliath eating dust in this morning’s story.

So, as you listened to the story that (Claire/Harry) read; – I want to ask you - who you identify with in this story. (pause) Because, what I found most interesting as I prepared, is that I realized that 99% of people who hear, or read this story usually identify themselves with David. Even here in America, we are a nation, who all have at least this one thing in common, we think we’re the little guy. And - when we watch daily news reports, or a good movie, whether it’s about athletics, business and politics, isn’t it also true that instinctually, we all feel the pull of righteous indignation to root for the little guy. And I suppose because of the way we are wired, I’ve always thought that God was on the side of the little guy.

For instance; when I recently watched the 2019 movie called; Dark Waters; the true story staring Mark Ruffalo as Attorney Rob Bilott who fought a case against the corporate giant Dupont; which was polluting the waters of Ohio and West Virginia communities – you better believe I was pulling for Mark Ruffalo’s character and all of the citizens who were harmed by that corporate giant. Everyone loves movies that have the under-dog winning in the end. Everyone cries in the final frame of the film when Lassie comes home. We all love to see the small liberal arts college teams fight and win, going on to challenge the big state-school powerhouse. It makes everyone feel good!

But hold on. I think we need a little reality check here because – in reality, we’re not the little guy at all. Are we: In all reality, most inspiring movies, about the resilience of the little guy, were made hugely popular, by a faceless Hollywood corporation; yes exactly the kind of giant, the attorney in that popular movie is standing up against.

So why is it that we say we like the little guy? Why is it, that we always want our movies to be about David, but we spend our lives trying desperately to be like Goliath? We think David is very clever, getting by with only five smooth stones and a sling shot; and yet we spend our own energies stockpiling swords and spears and javelins. We admire the fact that David forswore Saul’s armor and gadgetry, but just look at all the gadgets we buy or have for our cars, and homes. Everything has to be smart! And I have to admit I know how to use just the basics in their technology. (On, off, text, phone, camera.) And, just look at our country: we make sure every year to beef up our national security and military industrial complex budget so that we are the Goliath in our world.

And just think about it – people - legal and illegal want to come to America. Why? Because it gives you a chance to be Goliath. It gives you the armor and the weaponry and world respect. (Or at least it used to.) It gives you all the things Goliath had. All the things David didn’t*.*

And yet, in today’s story David, full of confidence, faith, and hope, tells Saul “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.” Then discards the heavy armor Saul gave him for protection. And just like in the movies, David then goes on to tell Goliath; “I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; so that all the earth may know that there is a God – and that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord’s and he will give you into our hand.” And, Goes does! David defeats Goliath.

But then, what’s the “rest of the story” beyond today’s text? The people then, get behind David and David becomes the king, and gradually – the irony of the story is - David became Goliath*.* David became a bully; a merciless military powerbroker and ruthless acquisitor of pleasure and advantage. Just like so often happens in real life; David becomes the hedonistic, insatiable, bloated beached whale he’d begun his career destroying. David became Goliath*.* And what a tragedy that was.

I think about how we raise our children so innocently – and yet later we encourage our young David’s to leave home and spend the next 10 or 20 years building their security and wealth congratulating them when their arsenals and layers of armor are secure. It happens to the best of us - and one day they look back and can’t even recognize their children or themselves.

But in today’s story David says there is another way for us to avoid, or get back our innocent David selves, even when the whole world seems to admire and fear and get behind Goliath? With all of our advisers; like Saul, saying, “Here’s this armor; you’d better put it on; you’re going to need this round here in order to climb the ladder and advance and succeed.” David in today’s story tells us how to protect ourselves, and remain true to ourselves and our Christian walk when challenges and storms are raging around us?

David’s words in verse 47 are the key in where our power really comes from, when he says to the giant; “the battle is the Lord’s.” David was confident in the power behind these “5 smooth stones”, because David knew the source of that power. The source – God, is where David got his power. God’s power. And your power. Let’s look at the stone in your hand and talk about these “5 smooth stones” for a moment, and find out the secret of David’s power to overcome – that storm called; Goliath.

Stone No. 1 for David is, he made peace with ordinary living. During the first part of today’s story, David knew how to put his own needs and desires to the side for an extended period of time, in order to do what God was calling him to do, even though it was hard, unglamorous work. He looked after his father’s sheep, and takes provisions to various commanders of the army. He was a “nobody”. And some days of our lives are just like that. Sometimes months and years of our lives are like that - unrewarding, un-recognized and unattractive. Most of us have, or will no doubt, spend some portion of your life caring for children, dusting and vacuuming, being unemployed, and doing those jobs that have no glamour or acclaim. Those can be some of your life’s most defining moments. Either you learn the rhythm of the everyday, or you lapse into a sequence of escapist thrills punctuated by hours and days of resentment. David found a way to make the ordinary into a form of training, and with pride he turned the mundane into a way for him to build relationships. That’s where he got his power.

Stone No. 2 for David is, he made friends with nature and his surroundings. David doesn’t rely on technology or physical advantage. He has spent his whole life up to this point, outside. He knows how to tend sheep. He knows where to find smooth stones. He knows how to craft a slingshot. Goliath on the other hand, has no idea about these things. If we want to be like David, we need to ask ourselves; “When was the last time I felt the joy of nature and sharpened my wits; by spending some time in the fields, by a stream, or on a mountain top? Have I so surrounded myself with gadgets and comforts and appearances so much that I’ve forgotten the skills money can’t buy?” Some tricks you’ll never pick up in an office, a laboratory or on google. David learns from the outdoors, he knew the wisdom of the owl, the cunning of the fox, the agility of the wildcat, the sharp eye of the eagle. And he took on bears and lions to protect the sheep and he overcame them. His power was in knowing his surroundings.

Stone No. 3 for David; he knows himself. Saul assumes David should be like Goliath. So, he gets out the full set of armor -- bronze helmet, coat of metal plates and a hefty sword. But David knows he’s not Goliath. And he knows he’s not Saul. And maybe if you’re feeling burdened right now, could it be because you’re wearing someone else’s armor? Are you trying to be someone you’re not and never will be? How’s that working out for you? Instead, you need to strive to be what only you can be. Don’t be a second-rate version of someone else. Not your dad, not your boss, not your sister, not your best friend – nor some on-screen celebrity. God made you the way you are because he wanted you to be you. David knows there’s no point putting on Saul’s armor. Saul might have thought that he was being disrespectful, taking unnecessary risks, and would let him down. But David knows there’s no use trying to be Goliath. David knows his own weaknesses. And he knows his own strengths. That’s where he got his power.

Stone No. 4 for David is; he knows he is not God and he knows who God is. David knows Goliath is not God. Goliath is the big intimidating reality in front of him right now, but David knows what’s in front of him isn’t the ultimate reality.

Yet, one of the tragedies of our stories is that too many Christians have lost respect and trust of other people, of other affiliations and cultures and faith because we have turned Jesus into a Goliath. And Jesus is not a bully. Jesus is not Goliath. Whatever your view of truth -- faith -- Goliath is not God. And David knows that. David knows where the power of the universe lies, and it’s not with Goliath. That’s where David gets his power.

And finally, stone No. 5. David knows what power fundamentally is. From the 1st - 4 stones we’ve learned; that there will be “ordinary” days in our lives; that we should know the world around us; know ourselves. And most of all, know who God is. And in the 5th stone David knew that power was not in Goliath’s bravado, not his muscle or armor, nor that he was the preferred champion at the time. No but David knew his skill was in his God given wisdom and faith in knowing the truth.

Tragically, David lost sight of that power, later on. As most of us tend to do, for a season. And when we do our problem is the more we try to become Goliath, the weaker we become. It shows we’ve lost sight of where our true power in a storm lies. So, this morning we are reminded; that may we never turn our God given strengths and gifts and talents into armor or weaponry, into protecting ourselves or damaging others. Remember these; five smooth spiritual stones. May you hear David whispering to you: “You don’t need to become Goliath.” You have a power that Goliath will never know.

Let us pray: Gracious God, we thank you for this day of rest. We thank you for your holy word and the music and prayers and friends gathered here today. Your scripture today brings us face to face with our trust in you in any storm on our faith journey. As we are often caught in the storms of life both physical and emotional, we must face our fears of thinking that we are alone – and remember the truth that you are a peaceful presence during our darkest hours and days of despair. We thank you for these scriptures that help us to know you and that our true power lies in our weakness as we submit our lives to you and listen for your guidance – especially when we face a Goliath storm. Today we pray for others. Those who are ill, grieving, suffering from the ravages of wind, rains, droughts or suffering from division and separation. Surround everyone with your healing spirit and may they truly sense that you walk with the.

Invocation: Merciful and loving God, you who are our wellspring of all that is. You are the sea on which we float. You are the wind that fills our sails. You are the storm that buffets us. You are the calm that brings us peace. Open our ears to hear Your word. Open our eyes to see Your beauty. Open our hearts to be warmed by Your love. Free us from our isolation and fear, selfishness, and doubts the morning as we worship and praise you and make us over, day by day, in your image into bearers of Your peace.

Offertory Call: You are our sense of security and in this we trust

Benediction: Never be an stone in anyone’s way, but remind them of the good news to rejoice that God is all powerful and with them in every storm. Go in peace.

Children: 5 smooth stones.