

Sermon for February 10, 2008

Boscobel & Mt. Zion UMCs

Text: I Samuel 17:1-11 (12-31)

Title: "Facing YOUR Giants"

Introduction: We begin a new series as we begin the season of Lent. We were not able to worship this past week for Ash Wednesday due to weather, but I don't want to skip over it all together. Ash Wednesday signals the beginning of the season of lent or 'lencten', which means 'spring'. I don't know about you, but 'spring' sounds awfully good to me right now.

Lent is that time of the Christian year that we are challenged to come to a full understanding of life and death and sin. Lent, the 40 weekdays between Ash Wednesday and Easter, is the season when Christians, traditionally, have prepared themselves for baptism; because years ago the only day the Church performed baptisms was Easter. So, Christians would devote their time in those 40 days to prepare to serve God, much like Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness AFTER His baptism to allow God to prepare Him for His ministry.

The idea is that when Easter comes, we have a full understanding of what happened on the cross. Jesus took our sins and the sins of the world up on that cross with Him and those sins died when Jesus died. Jesus died, suffering on the cross so you and I don't have to!

We also approach Lent with the Catholic tradition of 'penance'. Our attitude and our actions need to reflect the sorrow we have for our sins. Our 'penance' shows that we understand that WE hung Jesus on the cross. Kind of a time-warp thing, but if you and I don't sin, Jesus doesn't have to hang on that cross to kill it. So, every time you and I lie, cheat, steal, lust, slander God, disobey our parents, etc. it's like we are the ones who are spitting on Jesus, mocking Him, whipping Him until his flesh tears, slamming a crown of thorns down on His head until his head bleeds, nailing Him to a cross and mocking Him some more while He hangs there in public. Do our lives show that we understand that that's what we've done to Jesus and we are SORRY!

That's what this time of year is about ... Taking an inventory of our relationship with Jesus and deciding that it's going to get better as we get closer to Easter.

So, maybe this year you are in need of some 'penance'; a chance for you and Jesus to face what your past looks like, and for you to say to Jesus, "I'm so sorry. It won't happen again." Or, maybe you need get prepared for living the rest of your life serving God like Jesus did in the wilderness.

That's what we're going to do in this series between now and Easter. We are going to face the Giants in our lives that prevent us from being the people that God created us to be. There are things, feelings, emotions that we face every day that hold us back ... things that we can't seem to get past so we can carry out God's plan for us! We all have emotions or past experiences that loom over us like Giants. Giants that tell us that we're not good enough, we're not smart enough; that we're not forgivable and that God cannot possibly want great things for me!

Over the next few weeks we are going to fight back. We are going to listen to the heroes of the Bible and learn how they handled the Giants of FEAR, WORRY, GUILT, RESENTMENT, DOUBT, AND FAILURE.

I thought it would be a good idea to start with the basics of GIANT COMBAT. When I say “GIANT”, which Biblical character comes to your mind as the most popular actual Giant? Right! GOLIATH!

Goliath was the large front man for the band of Philistines that were going to invade Israel ... again. Goliath is believed to be between 9-1/2 to 10 feet tall. That’s huge! And he was challenging anyone in the Israelite army to go one-on-one with him for all the marbles. Before we go any further, let’s back up a bit...

I. Setting the Scene

- A. The King of Israel at that time was Saul. Saul had started out in God’s favor, but at some point quit relying on God and really started liking himself. This led to some problems with depression, anxiety and fear.
1. As a remedy to his struggles, some of King Saul’s advisors had suggested that he have someone on hand to cheer him up when needed.
 2. David, the youngest son of Jesse, from Bethlehem, was hired on as a musician. He played the harp / guitar in a way that really did cheer Saul up!
 3. David became one of Saul’s favorites, then some time later...
 4. At this time I invite you to take the insert out of your program. Yes, we have a lot of announcements this week, but there is a little room to write notes at the bottom of the side with our Scripture for today on it. My hope is that you will hear something that will challenge you and you’ll want to write it down to use again in the future. Let’s start with reading our Scripture...

READ I SAMUEL 17:1-11 NOW AND PRAY!

- B. I want you to picture this scene: Saul’s army has been alerted that the Philistines are going to invade Israel. He gathers his men and heads out to the hills of Elah, 15 miles West of Bethlehem / Jerusalem area.
1. The Hebrew Army camps on one side of a large valley, staying between the Philistines and their cities. The Philistines have taken charge of the opposite hillside.
 2. Here’s how I picture the Philistines. They’re kind of like the Oakland Raider fans. Metal helmets with spikes, dog collars, tattoos, with big boots ... Lots of black and silver (or bronze in their case). They have their spears stuck in the ground around their camp to claim their turf. And they’ve got some serious attitude!

3. Then, there's Goliath. In those days it was not uncommon for opposing armies to challenge each other to "single combat". "Your best against our best for all the marbles." It saved lives!
 4. Here's a man who is 9'9" tall and probably not skinny. He's huge ... legs like tree trunks, arms like legs, a 56-inch waist, a barrel chest and a voice to match (think WWF or WWE or whatever it is now). I can see him flexing his barbed-wire-tattooed biceps as he calls out to the Israelites, "Who will fight me?" Mano a mano! Twice a day Goliath challenges the Israelites to come and fight. Once in the morning and once at night.
 5. This guy is huge. My question is; how big is the giant in your life? What are your chances against your giant? Does it seem like an impossible fight?
 6. Maybe your giant doesn't wear a helmet and carry a spear, but it comes at you with things like: fear, abandonment, abuse, addiction, depression, unemployment or resentment. And you probably have not planned a trip to the hills of Elah, but your giant meets you at work, at home, in the classroom or at the bar. You have bills you can't pay, people you can't please, addictions and lusts that you cannot resist, a career you cannot escape and a future you cannot face.
 7. You've heard the challenge of Goliath's bellowing voice! It might be the first thing you hear when you wake up and the last thing you hear when you fall asleep...
 8. ...And how long has your giant been attacking you? Understand that the Philistines were long-time rivals of the Israelites. Joshua drove them out 300 years before this and they had been back numerous times since.
 9. What giant are you dealing with that has been in your family for years? Saul had to be saying, "Oh no, not again. My dad fought his dad and my grandfather fought Goliath's grandfather. When will this end?"
 10. Similar, we have giants that run in our families. When will the end come? "I'm a workaholic like my Dad." "I rely on alcohol like the generations before me." "Divorce is what my family does..."
- C. Well, in the meantime, Jesse is sending his son, David, the shepherd boy from Bethlehem (get the Jesus connection?) out to take food to his brothers and their captain. David's three oldest brothers were enlisted in Saul's army, so they stayed with Saul all the time. David was part time with Saul and part time taking care of Jesse's sheep.

1. David gets to the front there in Elah and sees what is going on. Goliath and his Philistine back-up band have the Israelites “terrified and deeply shaken (v.11).”
2. Here’s where we’re getting to: *Do your Giants have you terrified and deeply shaken? Do you even recognize the Giants that stand between where you are now and all the great stuff that God has planned for you? (REPEAT)*
3. If you recognize the GIANTS in YOUR life, is that all you **hear** ... morning and night ... the same challenges over and over again? Is that all you can **see** is that HUGE GIANT standing between you and the life that God wants for you (remember, Jesus said he came that our joy would be complete!)?

II. Approach Your Giant David’s Way

- A. Further on in I Samuel 17 (read it!), David starts asking questions. This is the first time David has a speaking role in our Scripture. Remember, David will be known as the greatest King Israel has ever had! Here are his questions:
 1. “What will a man get for killing this Philistine and putting an end to his abuse of Israel?”
 2. “Who is this pagan Philistine anyway, that he is allowed to defy the armies of the living God?”
- B. David’s first questions have to do with God and God’s people. The soldiers and their King are not mentioning God; they are just “terrified and deeply shaken”.
- C. David does the same thing when he approaches King Saul for permission to fight Goliath on behalf of Israel:
 1. 17:37 = “The Lord who saved me from the claws of the lion and the bear will save me from this Philistine!”
 2. No talk about the odds of defeating Goliath. No chit-chat about how Saul’s anxiety, stress and depression have been. “Still have a little acid reflux?”
 3. Just right to the point ... “I’m going to defeat Goliath in the name of the Lord!”
 4. Do you notice what David is focused on as he prepares to fight the Giant?
- D. Then, David comes face-to-face with Goliath.
 1. Goliath mocks David, “Am I a dog that you come at me with a stick?” I think Goliath just called David, “Twig-Boy”?!? Anyway, it was an insult from Goliath...
 2. Goliath goes on, “Come over here (Twig-Boy) and I’ll give your flesh to the birds and wild animals!”

3. David's response has little to do with the Giant he has to deal with. See if you can sense a theme of what David is focused on...
 4. ⁴⁵David shouted in reply, "You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD Almighty—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶Today the LORD will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head. And then I will give the dead bodies of your men to the birds and wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel! ⁴⁷And everyone will know that the LORD does not need weapons to rescue his people. It is his battle, not ours. The LORD will give you to us!"¹
- E. Are you getting notes on this? When David faced his giant, his focus was not on the giant at all; his focus was on God. As a matter of fact in I Samuel 17, David says 11 things about his fight with Goliath. Only two of them are focused on Goliath...
1. V.26 = "What will a man get for killing this Philistine...?"
 2. V.36 = "...I'll do it to this pagan Philistine, too..."
- F. Nine comments David made were about the Lord and the power of the Lord to help him defeat Goliath.
1. God-thoughts outnumber Giant-thoughts 9 to 2. That's 4 times as many God-thoughts as Goliath-thoughts!
 2. David never asks about Goliath's age, skill, height, weight or IQ. He doesn't ask about the weight or makeup of the weapons Goliath will be using. He really doesn't give much thought to Goliath at all.
 3. His focus is on his own power ... God.
- G. David spent four times the amount of time focused on God than he did on his giant-sized challenge. I wonder how that compares to our ratio?!
1. Do you think about God's grace 4 xs as much as you think about your guilt?
 2. Do we focus on God's forgiveness 4 xs as much as we focus on our screw-ups?
 3. Do we list 4x the amount of God's blessings as we do our complaints?
 4. Are you 4 xs more likely to talk about the strength of God (like David) as you are the difficulties of your day-to-day?

III. Conclusion

¹*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*. 1997 (1 Sa 17:44). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House.

- A. I don't know about you, but I could use a hero. God said that David was a man after his own heart. God claimed a God-likeness with David. There's a hero!

- B. Now, remember that David was not perfect!
 - 1. He had at least as many downs in his relationship with God as he had ups ... adultery, murder, cheating, lying and downright disobedience to what God said for him to do.
 - 2. We'll talk more about David's downfalls in a couple of weeks.

- C. Yet, David was a man after God's heart. He strived to be who God wanted him to be even though David was incredibly human...
 - 1. I want God to say that I am a man after God's heart!
 - 2. This story is a great example of being who God wants us to be.
 - 3. Stay focused on God = Giants fall down and go boom!
 - 4. Stay focused on the Giants = I fall down and go boom!

As we continue this series, this is the first thing to remember when it comes to "Giant Combat" = Stay focused on God!

Next Week: We start with the ultimate Giant ... FEAR! We are going to attack with Five Weapons that we can use over and over. See you here!

Let's Pray!