

God Does Not Forget  
(1 Samuel 17:32-49, Psalm 9:9-20)

Violence is what gets attention in our world. Violence fills the evening news night after night, and violence captures the biggest headlines in our daily papers. A friend of mine said that she deliberately did not read the details in a newspaper account telling what happened to the two servicemen who were captured and killed in Iraq recently. It would be too disturbing. It's hard to escape from such disturbing pain. In Israel a family spending the day at the beach is blown up. Israel claims it was a Hamas bomb. Others say it was most certainly an Israeli missile gone astray. A gay man is beaten to death. A black man is chained to a pickup truck and dragged to death. In Oklahoma City disaffected Americans bomb the Murrah Building. In Waco, Texas a standoff with the Branch Davidians ends in a fiery holocaust. Our world as often as not tries to stop violence by counter-violence. And yet, in the end, the cycle of reprisal continues, hatred grows and the world seems little better for it all. All of this violence makes preaching the story of David and Goliath a challenge. We desperately need something different, but is there anything in the story about David and Goliath that can point us in the right direction? The story is as well known as any in the Old Testament, and yet you would pull your child out of Sunday School if we showed a videotape of what happened. David decapitates his enemy in front of two opposing armies. Then the General of Saul's Army, Abner, takes David to see the king. In comes General Abner, one arm is wrapped around David. The other holds the bloody head of Goliath. This story is very difficult, because it can suggest that violence is an acceptable way to resolve disputes. It can justify violence between races and religions. It can justify our harmful acts against others under the guise of God being on our side. Jesus says, "Do not resist an evildoer...if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other cheek... Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..."

What David did was violent, but the story itself directs us to walk in a totally different direction. Look at the story with Christian eyes and you see that it is not a story promoting violence and counter violence, but a story that pits faith in strength against the strength of faith, and faith wins. If you look at it through the eyes of faith you see that it not as a struggle for national sovereignty, but as a struggle to make it known that God is ultimately in charge. God wins—not military power, not the force of armies, not the strength of the arm. Goliath was a bully and a braggart. He came with spear, javelin and sword. He trusted in his military might. In our story, Goliath does not win. King Saul was a coward, hiding in his tent. But he, too, trusted in military might. He has a bronze helmet that he wore in battle, and a coat of linked chains, which was the equivalent of today's bullet proof vest. He urged David to use military might to win the day, but when David tried it on, it bound him up. "How are these any use to me?" David asked Saul. "I can't even walk when I wear them." He could not count on military might, but he could trust in God. If evil was going to be defeated, it would not happen by military might, but by faith in God.

The real reasons that David entered into this battle are two:

- 1) "So that the world will know that there is a God [in Israel]."
- 2) So that people will learn that it is not by might, or by the sword that God brings salvation, healing into our lives, but by his loving power.

David did not fight Goliath to further a cycle of violence. He did not fight Goliath so that one bloody, corrupt regime could be replaced with another just as ruthless. The God David worshipped was a God who never forgets the oppressed. God never turns a deaf ear to those who are the victims. God's heart is a heart that loves the poor, the victimized, the abused, the lonely, the hurting. David fought so that the whole world will know that God does will not allow injustice to forever go on crushing the innocent and the powerless, forever grinding the face of the poor. David killed Goliath so that all the world would know that God who is righteous and just. That in the house of this God is it is not power and violence and military might that rule, but justice and righteousness. In God's kingdom bullies don't win. In God's house the abused are set free, but when they are, they do not become abusers in their own right.

There are a lot of bullies in our world. Our list of Goliaths include racism, prejudice, corruption, greed, classism and many others, and our Goliaths are much more complicated than the Goliath David dropped with one smooth pebble. Our hearts rejoice when, against all odds, righteousness wins against impossible odds. The movie *A Civil Action* tells the story of how a large company, defending against a lawsuit, uses intimidation and threat to win its case. *North Country* tells the story of how women were harassed when they first tried to work at steel mills in Minnesota. *Mississippi Burning* recounts how it took decades to bring to justice one who planned the murders of three civil rights workers.

There are lots of bullies in our world, but not everyone big is a bully. Bill Gates is the wealthiest man in the world. But he is not a Donald Trump glorying in his power to fire. Bill Gates just recently he announced a two year disengagement from Microsoft. He is leaving his position as CEO so that he can manage the work of the Bill and Melinda Gates organization. Two weeks ago we saw the work that foundation is doing in India to stop the spread of AID's. This week we heard that seventeen million is being given to renovate libraries in New Orleans. Not all giants are named Goliath. Hollywood stars make big targets for resentment and envy, and yet I was impressed to hear that Angelina Jolie gives one third of her income to helping various causes, and equally impressed when she said in essence that it was hardly much of a sacrifice considering her income. One of the causes she is involved in is an effort to work with rebel groups in Africa, trying to get the leaders and to train their soldiers in such a way that civilians will no longer be targeted and women and children no longer raped. Somewhere a dream is alive that, even if fighting continues, the kind of genocide that sweeps all away can be controlled—that there can be another way.

David said he was doing what he was doing, "so that the world will know that there is a God." When a well is drilled in Africa to bring life to residents of a village, the world knows that there is a God. When the followers of Mother Theresa bring communion to those dying in the streets, the world knows there is a God. When governments and non-governmental organizations work to end polio, stop the spread of AIDS and bring health care to the needy, the world knows that there is a God. When committed people work together to fashion just and workable laws, just and righteous economic systems, just and fair ways of dealing with immigrants and foreigners and third world countries, then the world senses somehow that there is a God in this world.

When an army publicly defeats an enemy, kills him, puts him in jail, blows his headquarters sky high, it feels like a decisive victory for good. Rome's policy was to

promote the Roman peace through cruel and brutal crucifixions. Mess with Rome and die a long and painful death. This kind of victory is easy to believe. What is not so easy to believe is that a long and painful death on a cross could be the smooth stone that finally brings down the Goliath of oppression. “The Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's.”

I think that in many ways we are fighting against Goliaths in our day—when we send shoe boxes filled with good things to needy children around the world—when we raise money for the food pantry or for cancer—when the money we give goes to Presbyterian mission in the world. Every day, we have opportunities to make the decision about how we hope to overcome obstacles in our living. When we are offended by someone and want to strike back, instead of going to them and seeking to be reconciled; when we want are tempted to put someone else down, to carry a grudge, to share a negative comment or resentment; when we are tempted to be indignant about how much we work and how little others work; when we try to motivate others by guilt or shame; when we give up on trying to personally communicate with someone in a non-threatening way what is bugging us—every time we have the opportunity to choose faith over might, grace over self-vindication. We have the choice to be creative and loving, patient and kind, never resentful, always hopeful, always forgiving in our dealings with others. In all of the struggles of our lives, the final outcome is not by might or by the sword, but by God’s presence and grace—the grace that we have come to know in Jesus Christ our Lord. God help us to be hopeful, creative people, facing every situation with hope and trust that God who has rescued us in the past can and will help us in the future, and always.