

First Presbyterian Church

Cheyenne, Wyoming

June 21, 2009

Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: Facing Giants,

1 Samuel 17:1a, 4–11, 19–24, 32–49, 2 Corinthians 6:1–13, Mark 4:35–41,

We all face giants at some time in our lives. The giants might be “story book monsters that are almost always large, hulking brutes around whom things get smashed, and weaklings cower.” There are also good giants who reach down to rescue us from the bad giants and lift us to safety. Stand in here with me as we spend some time together facing bad giants and a good one as found in today’s scripture lessons. We will look at three examples from the Bible. “Emphasis.” May/June, 2009

Last week we learned from I Samuel how God chose a twelve year-old shepherd named David, to be anointed King of Israel, to replace the failing present king, Saul. This week we will see how God was with David when he faced a giant.

King Saul and the army of Israel were forced to face a giant named Goliath of Gath. He was 9 foot 9 inches tall. He would have stood as high as the ledge at the top of the paneling on the wall behind the pulpit. Goliath was the “main man” in the enemy Philistine army. He was protected by a helmet, chest protector, and armor on his legs. He carried a javelin, a huge spear with a tip that weighed 16 pounds, and a very big sword. He also had a shield carrier that went before him. Goliath challenged and goaded Saul and his Israelite army to take him on in a one on one battle where the winner takes all. In today’s terms, Goliath sneered, “Come on you girlie men! You are nothing but a bunch of yellow bellied, chicken livered, gutless wonders. Is there anyone among you man enough to take me on?” King Saul and his mighty army were immobilized by fear of the giant, and humiliated by his trash talk.

What were the people of God to do? As we heard in the scriptures, the shepherd boy and future king named David, serving as a behind the scenes baggage handler, and the harpist/singer for King Saul, was delivering cheese sandwiches to his brothers in the army, when Goliath made his trash talking taunt. Upon seeing and hearing Goliath, David said he would take on the giant. I am going to guess that the twelve year-old David was about 5 feet tall at the time. To gain a perspective on this, I have asked my granddaughter Maya to come up to stand as an example of David. Maya is 5 feet tall and 11.5 years old. We can see the contrast between the height of Goliath and David as we look at Maya and the ledge at the top of the paneling. David was not afraid, for as a shepherd, he had saved lambs from bears and lions. (Thanks for your help, Maya.)

King Saul, whom we guess was about my height, 6 feet tall, mockingly tried to put his armor on David, but it would not fit. Saul’s sword was also too big for David to handle. Saul really did not want any armor or weapon to work. In truth, “The king was ever so ready to throw this young one to the enemy lion, for at least such action will detract attention from his own fear and inaction.” In reality, when nothing worked, David decided to face Goliath with only his shepherd’s staff, and slingshot with five smooth stones. “Emphasis,” May/June 2009

And, where was God in all this? As usual, God was with the underdog as we hear again what was said and done in this showdown. “The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance.” The Philistine insulted and cursed David. He shouted to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field.”

“But David said to the Philistine, ‘You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This very day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know 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.’” Tough words were shouted out from both sides.

When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.” Goliath was dead. The stone hit Goliath in the only vulnerable place on his body. The boy, the underdog, David, the next King of Israel, was alive. The Philistines fled in terror. God was with the underdog, David as he faced this giant.

As David spoke to Goliath, he gave himself over to the Lord and said, “May this assembly know 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.” Professor David Birch writes, “David is a model of another way, of those without the benefit of superior arms and armies who nevertheless trust that God can make deliverance possible against all odds, that there is hope even when faced with apparently hopeless situations. David refuses the armor, and he takes only his staff, his sling, and five smooth stones—the equipment of a shepherd.” “Deliverance does not come through trust in human might. God delivers in spite of spear and sword for the sake of the world’s knowledge of the source of true power, and the special relationship of the power to Israel.” “Both parties must know that the Lord saves! The array of swords and spears on either hillside represents power that cannot ultimately save. David comes with courage and hope, not because of superior weapons or training, but because his trust is in the surprising possibilities of God’s deliverance” when facing a giant. TNIBC. Vol. II, pg. 1112.

Our second example is from the Epistle lesson where the Apostle Paul also faced giants—giants in torture. While delivering the good news that God had come to the world in Jesus Christ to forgive us our sins and grant us everlasting life; Paul had to endure taunting, “afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, and hunger.” He was treated as an impostor. He had faced many giants of torture for his faith, but it did not stop him. Like David, Paul had given his life to God, and believed in God’s grace to save him. Paul had the bonus of being reconciled to God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul knew he had been given “weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left” to

defend himself against these giants of torture. These weapons from God were “purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God.” In the end, because of God’s weapons of righteousness and his faith in Jesus Christ, Paul came out victorious and so did the Christian church. Paul wrote about this victory from jail just before being beheaded by the Romans for his faith in Christ. We find these words in II Timothy 4: 6-8. “As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” This is a victory all who believe in Jesus Christ will know. In more than one way, God delivered Paul from giants he faced, too.

Thirdly, we have Jesus and the disciples facing the giant of the perfect storm. After a long day of teaching and performing miracles, Jesus instructed his disciples to take him across the Sea of Galilee to another town. Some of these disciples were expert fishermen. They knew this Sea of Galilee like the back of their hands, so they were very confident in the boat. Jesus was tired and confident, too, so he went to sleep. “Suddenly, their friend, the Sea of Galilee, rebelled. It caught them by surprise. The winds changed. The horizon melted and sky merged with sea in a toxic soup. This sea was supposed to be their friend but it kicked them in the shins and gave them a kidney punch. They turned the boat into the wind and rowed with passion. They were terrified. This tempest would not be tamed. They were about to bail. And still, Jesus slept on! One of them had to wake him before they swamped. Nobody knew who would make it to shore.” In a panic they cried out, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” How can he not care? He is in the boat with them! Jesus does not over react to their panic. “Jesus stood, then. He spoke and the winds hit a wall of silence. He sounded out the words that tamed the chaotic waters at creation, and once again the elements knew their place. More quickly than it had blown in, the storm whimpered away. Suddenly the skies were clear, the stars bright, the air fresh, and the sea shimmering as it reflected sentinel fires on the shore.” “Then he asked his stunned disciples about their faith and why they doubted” in facing the giant storm when he slept there in the midst of them? In Jesus Christ, God delivered the disciples from the storm giant they faced despite their fears and doubts. TNIBC Vol. XI, pg 99 and “Emphasis,” May/June, 2009.

As individual members of the First Presbyterian Church of Cheyenne, you have faced some huge giants in cancer, leukemia, death of loved ones, loss of jobs, divorces and more. You did not run or cowl, but called upon God’s help and fought back. The same can be said for this church as a whole in how we have faced giants that could have destroyed this church. Today, we face a few giants. At least they look like giants. We are searching for a full-time youth director and are calling references on some people. Will any of these be the right candidate to work well with our youth? Our Associate Pastor Nominating Committee just met for the first time this week. Somewhere down the road, they will face the same giants or questions about persons who will help us minister to young adults, younger couples and expand our adult Christian education program. But, there is a bigger perceived giant who lurks over all of

this. It is the giant called funding that has two faces. On the good face, we have funds set aside for one year of a youth director's salary. We have funds set aside for a year and a half of an associate's compensation. However, on the bad face, our giving for this year in the face of the giant, called "Terrible Recession," is down 9.7% from what was pledged. This giant sits upon some of us who also face unemployment and reduced retirement income and we cannot give more. For others of us the giant can spread fear about our own jobs and income. Knowing all this, our Associate Pastor Nominating Committee is moving very slowly in the search until the economy improves.

In facing these bad giants, what shall we do? I see two choices. Number one is acting like King Saul and his mighty army, or the torturers of Paul, or the scared to death disciples in the boat. Shall we be immobilized by fear, and humiliated by trash talk that we are not capable of supporting the ministries our youth and young adults and young couples seek? Shall we allow our faith in Christ and our vision to reach out to bring people together in Christ's love to be weakened by the torture of wrestling with what to do? Shall we cry out in despair and doubt and prepare to abandon ship as this economic storm rocks our boat?

Or, secondly, shall we face the bad giants like David, Paul and Jesus did by turning to the good giant, God. Shall we pick up the stones of faith, love, hope, prayer and sacrificial giving and with careful aim, sling them into the bad face side of the giant called "lack of funding?" Even as we wrestle with what to do, shall we turn to the power of God and seek God's "purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, so our faith and unity of purpose are not weakened? As this economic storm rocks our boat, shall we stay calm, keep rowing into the wind and call upon the Lord Jesus who is the captain of this boat? What shall we do?

In the face of my own giants of fear and doubt, I chose number 2, how about you?