

**Altavista Presbyterian Church
Rev. Eduardo Soto, Jr.**

**“An Unexpected Hero”
Ephesians 3:14-21
I Samuel 17:38-49**

**Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 12, 2018**

Ephesians 3:14-21

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

I Samuel 17:38-49

Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail, and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not tested them. Then David said to Saul, “I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them.” So David put them off. Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd’s pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine.

And the Philistine moved forward and came near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. And the Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field.” Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a 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 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 host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give you into our hand.”

When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground.

“An Unexpected Hero”

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Did you know, the story of David and Goliath is one of a handful of stories that is known worldwide and is used in both religious and secular circles? Several species of animals have “Goliath” in their

names, indicating their unusually large stature. TV series, fiction novels, games, songs, even roller coasters are named “Goliath.” The story of David and Goliath promises to stay within the human lexicon as long as there is persistence in the presences of seemingly powerful and incorruptible giants of industry, politics, and even religion. My good friend John Calvin resonated with David and undoubtedly found comfort when he stood before the Goliath of his time, the Medieval Catholic Church. Like I said last Sunday, the devil likes to place before us Goliaths who intimidate us through size, glamor, or aggression. But we also saw how God equips, empowers, and enlightens his faithful when they come against these Goliaths. The reason the story of David and Goliath is known worldwide is because of the simple yet powerful message of encouragement. Why is it that the human race finds this story so encouraging? It has to do with an unexpected hero.

There once was a church not too different from ours and before worship started a biker came in. You know what I mean? He had long braided hair, a thick beard, the leather vest, biker emblems, tattoos. The whole nine yards. They’d never seen him before, and though the church is open to all, many of the members eyed him with suspicion and gave him a wide breadth. Now, the service started as usual, and after a time of praise and worship, the pastor stands up and tells the congregation that the day’s sermon will be delivered by a guest preacher. The church is surprised because they didn’t see another preacher up there. And that’s when the biker guy came forward and delivered his message on not judging books by their covers. While no one in that congregation would ever admit to it, many of them thought this rough and tough, Hell’s Angels-looking guy couldn’t be a Christian let alone a preacher. He sure enough didn’t look the part. And yet his message was not only timely, but extremely moving.

King Saul made a similar assumption when David came into his war tent expressing his compulsion and desire to champion Israel as Goliath’s challenger. Saul thought, “Surely this young man has the gumption to stand against the Philistine, but he lacks the proper implements of war.” Samuel doesn’t tell us why Saul dresses David in his armor, but we can guess it was because he assumed one strike from Goliath’s spear would do David in. Did you notice that the Prophet is making a parallel between Goliath’s armor and Saul’s? Helmet of bronze, coat of mail, and a weapon. In Saul’s eyes, the only way to combat this enemy is by mirroring his tactics. Isn’t that exactly what the devil wants? He wants us to retaliate using his tactics so we can play his game using his rules. The moment we react with avarice, anger, or acquiescence is the moment we play right into the enemy’s hands.

Instead of relying on the arms and armor of the world, David turns to tried and tested armaments. His staff, his slingshot, and five smooth stones are all with which David arms himself. It’s not that the helmet, mail, and sword weren’t apt for battle. The reason David rejects Saul’s ordnances is because he had not tested them. David’s true reliance was not on tools but on God. Remember, it was the Lord who delivered him from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear. What David knew as tried and true was God’s provisions. And what God provides is often contrary to human conventions.

Conventional wisdom states that equal or greater force is required to overcome a foe. In Saul’s mind, the only way to logically defeat Goliath is by, at the very least, arming and armoring oneself equally with Goliath. But human logic doesn’t work with God. In his opening statements to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul draws the church’s attention to Christ who is the wisdom of God. He even goes on to say, in allegory, if God had any foolishness within him or any weakness within him, even those

would be wiser and stronger than the strength and wisdom of the entire human race. God's sovereignty and holiness are what make him the greatest force in the world. Sovereignty and holiness are what make God, God! And what makes him *our* God, the One whom we can call Abba, Father, is his steadfast love and salvation. The mighty and awesome and awful force that is God is channeled on our side by God's gift of faith.

This is why David was able to go and face the Philistine giant. His trust was not in the sword or armor or even the slingshot. His trust was in God's ultimate power over everything. He says as much when he confronts Goliath. "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a 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*." It's not that Goliath defied Israel, he defied the God of Israel and the God of this world. "All the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly," everyone gathered here today, "may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear." God doesn't need our arms and armor. He doesn't need us at all. God uses us, and we should be pleased to be molded by the potter, but it is always to his glory and not our own. David was Israel's unexpected hero that day because his heart and his motives were pointed in the right direction, toward God.

So, church, I ask you: how are you making yourself a vessel for God's purposes? Are you clothing yourself with pride, greed, and lust; or are you clothing yourself with humility, generosity, and piety? Where are your motives directed? Do you do good works to lift yourself up, to appear more generous than you really are; or do your good deeds stem from a rightly ordered relationship with God? Do you armor yourself the way the world is armored, with cynicism, suspicion, and hard-heartedness? Or have you taken up the whole armor of God? The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword that is the Word of God. Look at those for a brief moment. The armor of God, those accoutrements, the things with which the Christian is to be covered are, from top to bottom: salvation, righteousness, truth, and peace. The arms of God, those instruments with which the Christian bears witness and lives daily are faith and Scripture. That's a whole sermon there, so for now I want to leave you with these questions: are you wearing and displaying God's salvation and God's righteousness? Do you live out God's truth and God's peace? Are you molded by God's faith, and God's Word?

Let us pray. O King Eternal, you oversee this world and you provide for our daily living. When we forget this, we invite the devil to flood our minds with false information. When our guard is down, we are susceptible to our enemies' taunts and attacks. Daily we need reminding that faith, hope, and trust in our devices and in human conventions are the deepest folly. Our trust should be in you alone, O God. Help us to be focused, as David was focused, always having you and your glory in mind. May we not be distracted by the trappings of humanity or the employs of the enemy. Rather, may we be clothed with the whole armor of God, that we may be faithful and zealous disciples of our Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lord of lords. It is in his name that we pray. Amen.