

June 20, 2021
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Meditation: "Supersize"

Have you ever stopped at a fast food restaurant and ordered something, a drink, or french fries for example, and they ask you, "Do you want to supersize that?" Well, the Israelite army had a supersize problem on its hands. One with the name of Goliath. The Philistines were an enemy of Israel. They laid siege to, and destroyed coastal towns of the Israelites and slowly they moved inland. I wonder if they are the ancestors of the Palestinians, which would explain a lot about the ongoing enmity between the two groups. Anyway, I digress. The Philistine army marched to a mountain town overlooking the valley of Elah, in Judah, and took up position. The Israelite army took up position on the mountain on the opposite side of the valley.

The champion of the Philistine army, Goliath, of Gath, walked out of the Philistine encampment and into the valley, accompanied by his shield bearer. Here was a man the Bible says was six cubits and a span, which would make him 9 feet, 9 inches tall. He had broad shoulders, a barrel chest, massive arms, and perhaps more imposing, a bronze helmet on his head, a bronze coat of mail that weighed 5000 shekels - 125 pounds, bronze shin guards, and between his shoulder blades, a bronze javelin with a 15 pound iron tip. He taunted the Israelites. "Send out your best man. If he defeats me, the Philistines will become your servants, but if I defeat him, you will become the servants of the Philistines." The Israelites had a supersize problem. One on one battle, winner take all, against a giant.

Have you ever had a problem that just seemed so big that it was overwhelming and you didn't know where to start? That's what the first year history class at seminary was feeling about the final exam. "Here," the professor said on the last day of classes, "are eleven essay questions. Seven of these questions will constitute the exam. You must be prepared to write three essays." I looked around the room. I knew what everyone was thinking. We have to write three essays, of seven of the eleven questions. We would have to know at least um, three of seven of eleven... We were theologians, not mathematicians, and learning all eleven seemed impossible to do in a week, especially with four other exams staring us in the face. All year long the professors had been talking about Christianity, I know, what a surprise, and the fact that we are a community. We are supposed to be there for one another, not compete against each other. At that moment we had an epiphany. We decided to use that one, deceptively simple teaching to our benefit. We gathered eleven people and assigned one essay question to each. In three days, we would gather again, and bring ten copies of our essay to hand out to the group.

Each of us would explain what we thought the question was asking, and walk through our answer. The group added individual perspectives and observations after each presentation, and at the end of a couple of hours all eleven of us could answer all eleven of the essay questions, and none in exactly the same way, so it wouldn't look like plagiarism to the professor.

My question for you is, what overwhelming problem is the church facing right now? You can take that as the body of Christ, the denomination, or your congregation. What is the biggest problem facing us? Getting back in the building? Balancing the budget? How to grow the congregation? Figuring out how to be relevant within the community in the 21st century? Discerning how best to answer God's call for us in 2021 and beyond? What is the number one, overwhelming challenge that we face right now?

For forty days the armies of the Philistines and Israelites would line up facing one another, and Goliath would come forward and taunt the Israelites, morning and evening. And nothing happened. Then, one day David's father, Jesse, sent David on an errand to deliver food to his older brothers who were in the army of Saul. David, the youngest of Jesse's sons was tending the flocks in the hills around Bethlehem, where they lived. David arrived in the morning, just as the armies were lining up against one another. He heard Goliath's taunt, and he went to Saul, their king, and said he would battle Goliath.

Saul was shocked. For forty days nobody dared go up against Goliath, for they were sure they would fail. And now a boy, a shepherd, wanted to take on Goliath. And....well, you heard the rest of the story a few minutes ago. David was the rock slinger, Goliath got stoned, and, if we'd read a little further you would have discovered that, young David got a head, as Charlie Farquharson put it.

David did not try and use Saul's armour and sword. David used what he knew; what he was comfortable with; what he was skilled at – the sling. David was courageous. He was willing to risk not only his own life, but the lives of every Israelite. David also had a deep faith. He was sure that God would be on his side; that God would give him the wisdom and the strength to use his skill successfully against what appeared to be overwhelming odds.

I know. You want to know how things worked out for the study group. All eleven of us passed. In fact, we did better than just passing. We had the eleven highest marks in the class. Later, we confessed to the professor what we had done to

prepare for the exam. She smiled broadly, pleased that we had learned to cooperate rather than compete, and pleased that we had done so well on the exam. What about the congregation, the denomination, the entirety of Christianity? Do we know ourselves well enough to know what our strengths and skills are? Are we courageous enough to risk everything? Are we willing to stop competing and start cooperating with one another – other congregations, other denominations, and other faith communities? Do we have a deep enough faith in God to take on those overwhelmingly big challenges in our communities and in our world, challenges that are staring us in the face and taunting us? The challenges are supersized. God is bigger.