

## **In need of a modern day David**

A sermon by the Rev. H. Paul Canady III

Rector of Christ Church, New Bern, NC, on June 24, 2018

[http://lectionarypage.net/YearB\\_RCL/Pentecost/BProp7\\_RCL.html](http://lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp7_RCL.html)

1 Samuel 17:1a, 4-11, 19-23, 32-49 Psalm 9:9-20

The story of David & Goliath is a story that has worked its way into the vernacular of various societies for a couple of thousand years. It's a story that makes for a great illustrated children's book, especially to highlight how a child who trusts in the Almighty can do anything, even slay a boastful and ugly giant. It's a story that has been told and told and told. Today's not a day for cutesy tales or illustrated versions that inspire deep questions from children that adults are afraid to ask. It's not even a day to harken back to the days of Noah where giants roamed the earth, according to the book of Genesis, and their interactions with humanity invoked God's anger to the point of flooding the earth. You can look that up yourself in Genesis 6.

Today's a day to remember the incredible depth of this story and the resiliency of God and of people who trust in God to pull them out of bad situation. The story of David & Goliath has echoes of the story of the people of Israel trapped in bondage in Egypt. The story of the Exodus was and continues to be a story that even the most marginally devout adherent to Judaism knows better than the story of how she or he got their name. It is as pivotal to the story of the Israelites as the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus is to even the most marginally devout Christian. It's the key to the whole of the faith. The Psalmist reminds us today,

*The Lord will be a refuge for the oppressed, \*  
a refuge in time of trouble.*

*Those who know your Name will put their trust in you, \*  
for you never forsake those who seek you, O Lord.*

God called Moses over to the burning bush to tell him that the cries of the Israelites in bondage in Egypt had been heard, and that Moses would be the one to lead them to freedom and a new start in a new land. Remembering that God hears the cries of the oppressed is a reminder of God's faithfulness and goodness. It's a reminder that has brought hope to hundreds of generations of people who put their trust God, whether they were the oppressed or not. It's part of why God and Samuel express dismay when the elders call upon Samuel to anoint them a king to be like other nations. Israel was forgetting all that God had done to pull them out of treacherous situations, those times they had been oppressed and in trouble and God was their refuge, God was their strength and their redeemer. It was just nine chapters ago that Samuel acquiesced to

their demand and made Saul the king of Israel. It was just one chapter ago that Samuel anointed David to be Saul's successor. And unaware of this, one of Saul's attendants invites David to play the harp for Saul to help sooth his nerves.

This is not a peaceful time. The Philistines keep trying to take this Promised Land away from the Israelites and the Chosen People of God keep having to fight for their land. Saul is mentally unstable and erratic in his behavior and decision making. This moment in the field of war in the Seventeenth Chapter of First Samuel is moment of truth for all involved. The Philistines have a giant on their team. If we are to trust the writer of First Samuel, Goliath is a about nine feet tall and he seems to have an ego to go with his stature. His armor alone is nearly 130 pounds. It's no wonder the Israelites stay on their side of the hill, huddled in fear of what might await them. But this is not about victory for loud, narcissistic egos that seek to impose their will by fear and bullying. This is a story reminding us that God hears and responds to the cry of the oppressed, even when those who are oppressed are huddled in their tents afraid of whatever powerful force may be waiting on the other side. God always, always, always chooses the underdog, the one who has all the cards stacked against them, the one who appears to have no chance of winning. God does not, in the long run, choose the side of the powerful or the elite who use positions of privilege to push down those who do not fit into whatever cookie-cutter mold fits their world view. God hears the cries of the powerless being used to advance the agendas of those in power, and God sends someone or many someones to help lead the powerless to safety and freedom. That's why we can't reduce this important narrative to the images of an illustrated children's book or even some piece of bumper-sticker, feel-good theology.

In thinking about the context and the magnitude of David & Goliath and how 21st Century American Christians might see this story in their own lives, I hope I haven't been too subtle. There are nearly 11,000 children<sup>1</sup>, many of whom are still in diapers, being held in custody, without benefit of legal representation, without knowing where their parents are or where they themselves are headed next. Departments of Child Welfare in Michigan and New York have reported children still in infant carriers sent to foster care in their respective states after being separated from their parents at the border<sup>2</sup>. Eleven. Thousand. Children. By contrast, the Craven County School system has a shade over 15,000 students enrolled. The conditions are not like summer camp or boarding school. They are in abandoned jails and Wal-Mart's, with the most rudimentary

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<https://www.nbcnews.com/health/kids-health/many-children-detained-under-zero-tolerance-border-policy-are-under-n885371>

2

<http://thehill.com/latino/393171-michigan-receiving-detained-immigrant-children-as-young-as-3-months-old>

basics. They might soon be housed on military bases. There are reports that even toys, sources of comfort, are being confiscated when they are separated from their parents.<sup>3</sup>

Feel how you want about where and how people enter this country and what we should do if they enter somewhere other than an approved crossing point, but by and large, those trying to enter with their children are fleeing violence and oppression in their own country. And there is no Scripture verse that condones or even allows for a neutral view of separating families and leaving the already vulnerable even more vulnerable. I believe Jesus said something about causing a child to stumble and millstones around our necks. Our restoration project behind me prevents us from seeing our stained glass window featuring Jesus and the very children his disciples wanted to send away as pests and a nuisance. At the beginning of the day and the end of the day and all the moments in between, these children and their parents were made, like you and me, in the image of God.

Very few of us have ever faced the level of intimidation and threat and poverty that families coming north from Central America have faced. By all accounts, it doesn't take much to end of up on the wrong side of the wrong group. I pray that you and I never face even half of what they've faced. But if we did, if the parents of your grandchildren did, wouldn't you do everything you could to get you and your children to a better life? Remembering the promises made at the Baptisms each of the last two weeks, wouldn't fleeing to a new life in a new land be part of the promise made to raise a child in the Christian faith and light? I firmly believe that our triumphant, echoing "We Will" to the question of supporting this child in their life in Christ extends to all children. We answer "I will with God's help" when asked if we *will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves*. We answer "I will with God's help" when asked if we *will strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being*. If you've ever wondered how and when you might do that, now is as good as time as any, and it can often start in our own hearts and move out from there.

We could likely rattle off several options for who and what we think Goliath is in this horrific situation. And some of us might even agree on those responses. It's not one person or even one group of people. There's a cadre of attitudes and policies that have created this Goliath that is pressing down and intimidating an already weak people. The bigger question isn't who Goliath is in this period of our history, but where is the David to declare their faith in the Lord of Hosts and sling the proverbial stone that will set these people free and most hopefully, reunite children with their parents. I don't know the answer to that question, but I'm relatively sure that it won't be one of the people or even institutions who created this mess.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/kids-toys-border\\_us\\_5b2a629ce4b05d6c16c99fd7](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/kids-toys-border_us_5b2a629ce4b05d6c16c99fd7)

But I know what we, here in a small town in North Carolina, can do to help make it better. We can join the cry of the oppressed and ask God to send relief in the same way God sent relief to the Israelites in bondage in Egypt and the way God raised up David to lead the people of Israel. In the same way Jesus was often at prayer in his most critical times, we too should be in prayer in this most critical time. Prayers for those being held. Prayers for guards and processors. Prayers for elected officials to have the intestinal fortitude to actually work towards a solution that regards the humanity of all those involved.

I hope you will join us Tuesday at 6:00pm in this space as we hold our nation in prayer, as we hold the children and their parents in prayer, and as we seek God's guiding hand during this defining time in our collective lives.

Let us pray:

**Look with pity, gracious God, upon the people in this and every land who live with injustice, terror, disease, and death as their constant companions. Have mercy upon us. Help us to eliminate our cruelty to these our neighbors. Strengthen those who spend their lives establishing equal protection of the law and equal opportunities for all. And grant that every one of us may enjoy a fair portion of the riches of this land. Keep us mindful that you have bond us together in a common life. In the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, help us to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>4</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> Merging of prayers found in the *Book of Common Prayer* on p. 824 & 826.