



*“Fear Not”
1 Samuel 17:
David slew Goliath
Nov. 4, 2007
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It was five-year-old Cameron’s first day of kindergarten. He was so excited as he waited for the bus with a group of children. His mother was a few steps behind him. But then another boy spit on him.

What a rotten thing to have happen on a day you’ve looked forward to. It could have ruined the whole day. Now Cameron had some choices: He could spit back, punch the boy or call him a bully. He could have cowered in fear, running back to where his mother was. Before his mother could intervene, Cameron looked the other boy straight in the eye and said ‘if you do that, I can’t be your friend.’

His mother reported, by the time the school bus arrived, Cameron had a new friend. The boys had their arms around each other and were the best of buddies.¹

Cameron could have acted in fear or in anger – very human emotions. Instead he took a route of courage and faith.

Fear and anger. That has a lot to do with our Scripture passage today. And a lot to do with our hindrances to working for peace in our relationships and in our world.

David and Goliath – it’s probably one of the most beloved stories of the Bible. And quite frankly as a short person, I rather like the fact that a small person conquers a giant in the story. We may have heard this story a lot as a child. Perhaps not as much in recent years as an adult. For whatever reason, the story of David comes up in our lectionary every three years in the month of July. So, it’s perhaps good that we’ve set aside the lectionary for the fall to enjoy David and Goliath.

There’s a lot of fear and perhaps bullying that’s going on in this story. The Philistines and the Israelite army are at a standoff. Israelites have good reason to fear the Philistines – remember they had more metal at their disposal than the Israelites did. The Israelites were mostly farmers with sticks and spears. Only their commanders like King Saul would have armour.

¹ Debbie Macomber, *Knit together: Discover God’s Pattern for your Life*. Faith Words, 2007, pp 46-47.

David comes down to bring food to his brothers. Goliath is taunting the Israelite army. Goliath is taunting how big he is. That he's stronger than they are. That they and their army are puny by comparison.

And we know what taunts are like – we remember them from the school yard – when another child called us names. We remember taunts that still haunt us – an unfair criticism. And perhaps the worst taunting are the voices inside: “You can't do that.” “Who do you think you are.” “Oh, it's not worth it. Turn on the TV instead.” “You'll never amount to anything.” You'll never be able to do that. “You're not smart enough.” “You're not good-looking enough.”

Advertising today can feed those taunts: “You have bad breath – no woman will come near you. Make sure you try our mouthwash.” “You won't get that job because you have yellow teeth. Use our teeth-whitening product.”

We know what it is to be taunted. We know what it is to be plagued by fears. So we can relate to how David's brothers, their comrades in the army and King Saul shake with fear.

Yet David is not shaking. He stands firm in God. He knows the power of God. Or as the author of second Timothy says: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity but of power, love and discipline.”

God gives us a spirit of power, love and discipline. Forget that fear. Better yet, hand it over to God. That's what we're called to do. Hand over our fears to God. Because our fears aren't from God. Chances are they're getting in the way of what God calls us to do.

One minister writes: “There's a two word phrase listed in all 66 books of the Bible and that phrase is FEAR NOT. God doesn't want us to be afraid, He wants us to reach out and grab hold of life, the abundant life, with both hands and revel. God says “Taste and see that the Lord is good.””²

This is God's most frequently repeated instruction. God wants us to be strong and courageous. You can trust me. Fear not. Why does God command us not to fear? Fear doesn't seem like the most serious vice in the world. It never made the list of the seven Deadly Sins. No one ever receives church discipline for being afraid. So why does God tell humans to stop being afraid more often than God tells them anything else? My hunch is that the reason God say, “Fear Not” so often..(is) because fear is the number one reason we are tempted to avoid doing what God asks us to do.”²

² From John Ortberg's *If you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the Boat.*

What do you fear? What's getting in the way of you serving God?

I'll tell you what I fear.

1. A peace campaign. If we give to the peace campaign, then we'll give less to the Mission and Service fund that helps so many people. And /or we'll give less to the local church and we have needs here too. But then all of these are worthy aren't they. All deserve our attention. God says, I give to you abundantly. Let's share out of our abundance.
2. I often fear we won't have enough volunteers to get a task done, or a project. I worry, I stew. I know some of you do also. But I think what we find is that if we keep those prayers up to God, new things happen. New ways we hadn't expected. Sometimes programs we've done forever, do get dropped. But others come along in a new way. Linda Thomson – doing the Christianity 101 with our teens. Do you know how long I've been praying about confirmation classes? Elinor has new ideas for a Christmas event on Saturday, Dec. 1.
3. I fear how to invite new people to church. I'm shy. I have a hard time with that. But I know I'm supposed to do it. I know I have to face my fear. So I do. It gets easier. And I thank God, that many of you are facing your fears and simply inviting folks to church or to some of our programs.

Fear and anger. We know that's why the peace initiatives of our United Church are important. We know the root of much world conflict has to do with fear and anger.

And to be people of peace within, we need to face our fears. Hand them over to God who says. 'Fear Not, I am with you. Even 'til the end of the earth.'