

First Sunday in Lent
March 9, 2025
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
One Stands

1 Samuel 17:4-11, 32-40, 45-49 (EHV)

A challenger who represented the Philistines came out from the camp of the Philistines. He was named Goliath of Gath. He was nine feet, six inches tall. ⁵He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he wore scaled body armor, which was made of more than one hundred pounds of bronze. ⁶He had bronze greaves on his shins and a bronze spear slung between his shoulders. ⁷The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spearhead was made of fifteen pounds of iron. His shield bearer went out ahead of him.

⁸He would stand up and shout to the armies of Israel, "Why have you come out to line up in battle formation? I am a Philistine, and you are servants of Saul, aren't you? Choose a man to represent you, and let him come down to me. ⁹If he is able to fight with me and kill me, we will be your servants. But if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our servants, and you will serve us." ¹⁰The Philistine would say, "I defy the ranks of Israel today! Give me a man, and we will fight each other!" ¹¹When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they lost their courage and were terrified.

³²David said to Saul, "Do not let anyone lose heart because of this Philistine! Your servant will go and fight him."

³³But Saul said to David, "You cannot go against this Philistine to fight with him, because you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior since he was a youth."

³⁴David said to Saul, "Your servant has been taking care of his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵I went after it and struck it and rescued the lamb out of its mouth. When the lion reared up against me, I grabbed it by its mane, struck it, and killed it. ³⁶Your servant struck both the lion and the bear. This uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has defied the ranks of the living God." ³⁷David added, "The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

Saul said to David, "Go then! May the Lord be with you." ³⁸So Saul dressed David in his own gear. He placed a bronze helmet on his head and dressed him in scaled body armor. ³⁹David strapped his sword over his gear. David tried to walk around in them, since he had never trained with this kind of equipment before.

David said to Saul, "I cannot go in these, because I have never trained with them." So David took them off.

⁴⁰Then David took his staff in his hand and picked five smooth stones out of the stream bed and put them into the pouch of his shepherd's bag. He took his sling in his hand and approached the Philistine.

⁴⁵Then David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord of Armies, the God of the ranks of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶Today the Lord will hand you over to me. I will strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth. Then all the earth will know that there is a God in Israel, ⁴⁷and all those gathered here will know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear, for the battle belongs to the Lord, and he will deliver you into our hand."

⁴⁸Then, when the Philistine started advancing to attack David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. ⁴⁹David put his hand into his bag, took a stone from it, shot it

from his sling, and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown to the ground.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Many years ago, I toured the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. Even if you have not been there, you've probably seen it too. It is often used for presidential inaugurations and funerals, and we've had one of each in the recent months. I remember the beauty of the art and architecture as we toured this large church. One large tapestry made a lasting impression on me. It was the account of 1 Samuel 17, David and Goliath. The artist depicted David holding the giant head of Goliath by the hair. What would such a graphic image be doing, hanging on the wall of a side chapel in the National Cathedral? I doubt many dignitaries pose for pictures after a state funeral with that tapestry in the background.

It is the part of the story that is often skipped in Bible story books for children and in Sunday School lessons. Our first lesson from God's Word today ends just before this graphic description. And I get it. We don't want to be too graphic. We don't want to glorify violence. We certainly don't want God's children to be scared by such images in their heads. However, that was not the reaction of the soldiers who saw David fell Goliath with one stone and then end Goliath's life with Goliath's own sword. The soldiers who had been scared were emboldened to defend the people of Israel. Instead of fear and disgust at what David had done, the women sang joyfully, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." When the very strong enemy has been defeated, fear diminishes and joy increases.

Goliath certainly qualified as a very strong enemy. He was much taller than anyone in Israel's army. His armor might have weighed as much as David did. And his spear was something else. Olympic javelins are less than two pounds. Goliath was throwing a spear that weighed closer to a shot put. He was big and strong and had weapons that would end the fight very quickly. In addition, he had confidence that he was the best. He was no gentle giant. Goliath was a fearsome foe.

David's older brothers were soldiers, but they were not brave enough to answer Goliath's challenge of one-on-one combat. No soldier in the army of Israel would answer the challenge. King Saul, who was himself a head taller than many in Israel, would not answer the challenge. So, David goes to meet Goliath in the name of the Lord along with his five smooth stones and sling. Down goes Goliath and the tapestry shows what happened to the fearsome foe. Goliath has no power to hurt, kill, destroy or cause fear anymore. One man, though his brothers and Goliath saw him as just a boy, stood in the place of all his people and defeated the enemy. One man won the victory for all.

Thousands of years before David stood up as one man against the enemy, the one man on earth stood against an even greater enemy. Satan appeared in the form of a serpent to kill and destroy by deceiving Eve into rebellion against the Lord. Instead answering the challenge and standing up to the enemy, Adam stood by his wife and said nothing as Satan's lies brought them both into rebellion against God. Adam fell on that field of battle in Eden. And, as the hymn writer puts it, "All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall" (CW 556). The one man stood in our place against Satan and failed the human race.

We who are born in the fallen image of Adam cannot do any better against this enemy greater than any Goliath. Satan can masquerade as an angel of light and deceive us into thinking we are doing what God wants when we are being led into great sin. Satan's native language is lies, and he is so good at it that we often think his lies are the truth. He knows our weaknesses and puts those temptations in front of us again and again, especially when we are most vulnerable. He is stronger than any of us.

And he is many times more arrogant than Goliath. Satan shouts out his challenges to us who are

like the soldiers of Israel trembling in fear. He challenges us by bringing up our past sins, terrible things that no one should know. He tells us that God could never forgive our rebellion. Then he challenges us by asking where God has been when we are suffering in life. Doesn't your God care about you? Then he offers something better. He tells us that God won't let you eat, drink and be merry in life, but Satan offers a life of earthly pleasure. We don't stand a chance against an enemy with such power, wisdom, and weapons to fell us.

Therefore, God sent the One Man to stand in our place on the field of battle. He is Jesus Christ, the second Adam. Every year, on the First Sunday in Lent, we see Jesus take the field of battle against Satan in the wilderness. Just as David was thought of as only a boy by his people and by Goliath, we see Jesus in the wilderness in a state of weakness compared with Satan. Satan would not dare to challenge the Son of God in all of his glory as true God. However, the Son of God has humbled himself to take on human flesh. He is true God and true man. That means that when Jesus has fasted forty days, he is hungry and weak. Humans do not do well in physical or mental competitions when they haven't eaten for many days.

Our champion enters the field of battle with Satan in a weakened state. The devil throws all the temptations at him. Your Father doesn't love you. You aren't really God's Son. Use your power to make life better for yourself. Put yourself in danger to see if your Father actually cares. Jesus defends himself from every blow of Satan. Jesus does not fall into any of Satan's temptations. Jesus holds the field of battle. One man, Jesus Christ, stood in our place against the greatest foe and gave his people the victory.

At the end of the season of Lent we will see Jesus enter the field of battle again. And again, he is weak. He does not look like a champion. He's been up all night after being arrested in Gethsemane. He's been beaten and mocked and flogged and mocked some more. His body was so weak that he fell under the weight of the cross he was made to carry. But he would not fall before the enemy who wanted him to avoid the cross. Jesus did not fail to offer up the perfect sacrifice. The art that depicts the suffering and crucifixion of Christ can be graphic because the historical event was very graphic. But in Christ's death, the head of the ancient serpent was crushed.

If we were to hang a large tapestry on the back wall of the sanctuary, I might suggest something like this: Christ with his foot firmly planted on the head of a large serpent. After David's smooth stone found its mark in the forehead of Goliath, David stood over his enemy to make sure the battle was won. Jesus will complete his victory over the great enemy when he throws him into the lake of fire at the end of the world. Until then, picture the foot of Christ crushing down on the head of the enemy.

When you fall into the temptations of the enemy, see your Savior standing over the enemy in victory. Your Savior has forgiven you. Your sins are not counted against you. The enemy will still tell you that God cannot forgive you for your evil. He will tell you that God must not care about you because of what you are suffering. Who are you going to believe? The enemy whose head is crushed by Christ, or your champion who stands in victory over the enemy? Trust in Christ when tempted. Trust in Christ when you fall into sin. Trust in Christ when you are scared. Trust in Christ when you face death. He is the one who stood in your place against every enemy and by his resurrection on the third day, we can be certain of victory over sin, death and the devil.

Therefore, we are like the soldiers of Israel after David felled Goliath. They chased the remaining enemies away. So also, we are bold to follow our Savior in a world that is under the power of the evil one. Jesus defeated the evil one. What can the world do to take me away from Christ? Nothing. We can be like the women who rejoiced in song when David returned victorious over Goliath. Whether in song or words, we rejoice in the great victory Jesus has given. We let the world know that Jesus is the one who stands victorious over the enemy so that more and more can rejoice with us. Amen.