

## **1 Samuel 17 David and Goliath**

**David and Goliath has entered into the mindset of the wider community, meaning in popular culture any battle against overwhelming odds. It is the stuff of the film The Castle, where the small battling family resist the rapacious developers.**

**Quite stirring stuff, but as we said last week in the story of the anointing of David, the small young shepherd boy as a future king, not all stories of the little battler against the might of the giant end well.**

**For instance last weekend when small battler football club Nth Melbourne in the bottom two on the ladder for the past five years and one win this year took on one of the largest clubs and the reigning premiers and were miraculously in front by a massive 54 points at one stage in the game... only to lose by one point.**

**We cannot simply say any time we have a battle on our hands it is a David and Goliath situation and therefore we can have confidence of the final victory. But of course we all identify with little David. We all can find something, somewhere, where we are overlooked, put down, the victim of some injustice. We idealise little David and tell moral stories about the smallest being the carrier of the godly message but we devote the vast energies of our lives wanting to be Goliath. We think it's quaint and clever that David got by with five smooth stones and a sling, but we spend our own money stockpiling (figuratively!) swords and spears and javelins. We admire the fact that David knocked back Saul's offer of armour, but just look at our car, just look at our house, we've beefed them up to look like Goliath.**

**Nor can we use this story as if automatically our enemies are God's enemies. When you imagine that God hates all the same people that you hate you can be pretty certain you have created God in your own image.**

**This story is both a classic, a much loved story often read/told to children, yet would also qualify as a "text of terror" – which is usually thought of as a story where God or God's people are portrayed as engaging in what we moderns consider very ungodly behaviour. Specifically, this usually involves killing enemies in the name or with the blessing of God. And this story could have been worse. The lectionary took us to verse 49 i- f we read on a couple of verses we would have come to**

**<sup>51</sup>Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it.**

**And a couple of verses more**

**<sup>54</sup>David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem;**

**Some people, understandably, find these texts of decapitating corpses and displaying the head as a war trophy beyond redemption, unworthy of being read and have nothing to teach us about God's way in the modern world.**

**Others will say of course we acknowledge biblical stories come to us from a, at times, vastly different mind set, politically, culturally and Yes, there are horrific things attributed to God, so we allow for all of that, but understood within their context we can still find some teachable points.**

**And so we may say of today's story it is wonderful in its presentation as the smallest, most unlikely person winning out against insurmountable odds, but we do not take as in any way God condoning David to kill someone and then decapitates the corpse.**

**There is another angle in thinking about what is going on in this story. The violence is justified because it is a small, bullied person (or nation) retaliating against sustained victimization. This is a common technique to justify violence adopted by story tellers and especially film makers and it usually succeeds in worming its way into our head and ends up actually legitimising violence**

**.As a young teenager I used to like watching the television series Kung- Fu. It worked on the basis that you found yourself just wishing the mild mannered Chinese man who was secretly a highly skilled martial arts exponent would beat the crap out of the bullying thugs that tormented him or other vulnerable and weak people they picked on. Typically they would call our hero derogatory names, cut off his pony tail, mock his Asian appearance, knock him to the ground, make him carry their load, spit on him, taunt him mercilessly, never knowing they were ridiculing and humiliating this lethal mild mannered person. And you found yourself just willing him to forget all that non violent stuff for 2 min and smack the hell out of these loud mouthed red necks. Give them what they deserve and a taste of what they have been dishing out to others This is a huge challenge to us as Christians to think through once again our commitment to non-violence and whether we are prepared to say all violence is unworthy of the gospel – a position once held by the church but now by typically Quakers (or Friends) and Mennonites.**

**Second point, I said there is no promise that any of us will overcome any particular obstacle. But what the promise of the gospel is that the god anointed movement – for that is what David and the nation are at this point in the story – will not finally be defeated. This is Moses before Pharaoh, Paul locked in prison but witnessing. It may be longer term and righteous cause**

that may take many many years to see the final light of day the victory. Yes, but Christ is with us, through the calm and the storms of life.

A boat is a symbol for the Christian church, perhaps best known as the symbol for the World Council of Churches. No doubt influenced by today's gospel reading where the disciples tossed about in the boat with Jesus cry out to him.

Something here for the church which also in our age has come to think of itself in David terms. Shrinking, on the decline, taunted by prevailing voices. Much of that is not entirely accurate. But we could learn from both our readings. Saul assumes David should be as much like Goliath as possible. So he gets out the full set of armor -- bronze helmet, coat of mail, hefty sword. But David knows who he is. He knows he's not Goliath. And he knows he's not Saul. He knows where his strengths lie and he knows he needs to be light footed, nimble, quick. If he tries to play the macho game, if he puts on someone else's armor and impersonates them he is a goner. He will be weighed down, burdened. Is isconformity to prevailing culture that is our armor we need to shed, buildings that have served previous generations well but now are a cumbersome, expensive burdeon.

Bible is full of these stories. So how do we discern what is the righteous, God anointed person or movement or ministry – well that is the role of the Spirit to lead us and our job is to be open to the leading of the Spirit, having ears to hear and eyes to see. So many times we identify with the little guy taking on overwhelming odds. We all have our giants that prowls before us, waiting to pounce and devour us. Wondering where we will get the strength for the struggle, the wisdom for the right decision, the endurance to last the distance. We fight, we struggle, we pray and long for deliverance and redemption, but be assured God will not abandon us and the Spirit of God will prevail.

There is an old Irish fisherman's prayer, 'Lord, the sea is so big and my boat is so small.'

'The storm may roar without me, my heart may low be laid; but God is round about me and can I be dismayed?'