

Giant challenges lurk in our life all the time. Many recent law school graduates faced a giant in their professional life the last week in July. The bar exam was given on Tuesday and Wednesday on the UNL campus. I talked with a recent grad just before the exam and the testing certainly seemed like a giant to him. Some giants we know are lurking around the corner, like a bar exam. Some giants surprise us out of the blue and we have to react in the best way possible. Then there are those individuals that are on the hunt for a giant as they know that taking one on is needed. I think David, the young teenage boy we read of in our Bible lesson, falls in the latter category.

David possesses courage. Living life with courage is our theme for worship this week. This summer our studies of the heroes and heroines of the Hebrew scripture have revealed special qualities to us. First, we saw the strength of Deborah, followed by the hope of Ezekiel, the witness of Micah, the power of Moses, the heart of Ruth and last week with the action of Miriam with the shaking of the tambourine. In David, we see courage. How might these qualities live in us as people of faith? That is what we are exploring.

Giant challenges visit our lives if we like it or not. Think of the giants you have faced in life. In addition, I invite each of us to think of how we can best face the giants, in whatever form they present themselves, down the road. The way you or I overcome a giant will be different from the way David defeated Goliath. But as we investigate David's approach we can ponder our own approach and therefore be better prepared for the next giant that comes on the scene. No doubt, it will take courage.

I have six characteristics that I picked out as I looked at David in relationship to Goliath that define his courage. First, he attended to the basics in his life. We saw this trait in Moses and Ruth earlier in this sermon series. We see that David is tending the sheep for his father and he was running the errands that his father requested. If we are not doing the basics in life there is no way we can address any giant challenge. The student athlete that makes the heroic play in a college championship game this upcoming year is presently working his/her tail off this summer in conditioning drills, no doubt.

Attending to the basics of life provides the foundation to address the giant challenges that come our way. In David's case, shepherding the sheep gave him clues on how to take on Goliath with courage but that is getting ahead of the story. What are the basics for you?
It's probably not shepherding sheep but we must identify the basics in our life and attend to them.

In the Biblical narrative we read that David's other brothers are serving in the army for King Saul and they are having a show down with the Philistines. The brothers have been gone for some time and their father is interested in how they are doing. Therefore, he sends little brother David to visit the troops with some food and to see how his brothers are faring.

David runs the errand, once again attending to the basics in his life. As he arrives to the location of the troops we see the second characteristic of courage emerge. It is initiative. David could have delivered the food, checked in with his brothers, and returned to his father with his report. That would have covered the basics. But he shows initiative, which is a key ingredient for courage. He not only hears that the Israelites are being threatened by Goliath but he goes to see Goliath. He seeks out the giant. It is one thing to fulfill our duty, fulfill the job description, to attend to the basics but the giant killers go the extra mile. They show initiative.

When he sees Goliath, David does not see a giant and fearsome warrior like everyone does but he sees a disrespectful, irreverent, crude bully that needs to be silenced.

The third characteristic we see in David is a reverence for God. This is the foundation for courage.

“You might call me names. That’s one thing. You might trash talk about my sheep. That’s another thing. But if you disrespect my Momma or my God then it is ‘go’ time for us.”

David had a righteous anger stir within him when he heard what Goliath was saying about Israel and God Almighty. He was having none of that. His reverence for God filled him with courage and called him to action.

Now let’s not paint David, or anyone for that matter, as holier than thou. Along with a deep reverence for God he was also opportunistic. He stated to anyone who would listen to a teenage kid among soldiers that Goliath could not be tolerated and something had to be done. When others heard him they informed him that the man (or boy) that defeats Goliath will be rewarded by the King. The reward was great. He was told that “the king will greatly enrich the man, who defeats him, and will give him his daughter (in marriage) and make his family free in Israel.” Good combination, serve God and be rewarded by the king.

Next we see that David is self-confident. This is an invaluable characteristic when facing a giant and a key element in courage. It is needed because whenever any of us go beyond the basics, shows initiative, and faces a giant there are going to be those who are doubters.

“Are you kidding me?”
“Wow, he pulling off more than he can chew?”
“Who does she think she is, that’s impossible!”

David got such reactions as he volunteered to take on Goliath.

Yet, before we see David face Goliath I invite us to stop for a moment. Please think of courageous people that you have known and have inspired you over the years. Where did their courage come from? Please think about that for a moment.

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Now let’s take a moment to greet one another and please share with those you greet some of the courageous people who have inspired you over the years.

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The initial response was, “You are not able to go against this Philistine...for you are just a boy and he has been a warrior since his youth.” Undeterred, David responded by saying,

“I’ve cared for sheep and when a lion or bear came, took a lamb from the flock, I went after it, struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth. If it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. ...
The Lord who saved me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Please see, that David’s confidence and courage comes from his assurance that God is with him. That is key for you and me. To take on a challenge we have to be assured that God is with us or our efforts will be in vain. I am confident that God is with us, here at St. Paul UMC, Omaha, and that is why we have fully embraced the ambitious steps that will take us to a sustainable future. With God, as the Apostle Paul’s says in Philippians 4:13, all things are possible. When David shared his confident strategy he was given permission to face the giant, Goliath.

When Goliath sees young David approach he is bemused and insulted that no more worthy opponent has been presented. For over forty days the giant has been challenging the Israelites to send an opponent to fight him. He forthrightly insults and then curses David.

David brashly replies that Goliath has no idea who he is up against as he proclaims

“You come to me with sword and spear and javelin;
but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts,
the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defiled.”

Once again, David is drawing on his reverence for God. David is announcing that it is not him that Goliath needs to fear but it is the God of Creation, the God of the Exodus who humbled Pharaoh, the God who brought the walls of Jericho down, that is who Goliath is up against.

Then we see the final characteristic of David when facing a giant and that is resourcefulness. David, with courage and clarity of mind, relies on the gifts and skills he had developed up to that point in time and trusted that God would not present him with this giant challenge if he did not have the skill set to succeed. That is another key for you and me to understand when faced with a giant in our lives. Trust that God has equipped us for the moment. Don't fret about what we don't have at our disposal but fully utilize that which we do have. Therefore, with clarity of mind, David drew on a particular skill that he had practiced since his childhood, using a stone in his sling shot. With that, Goliath came tumbling down and the teen defeated giant odds.

David responded to the giant Goliath with courage by attending to the basics in life, with initiative, being opportunistic, with reverence for God, maintaining self-confidence and by being resourceful. The narrative of David and Goliath invites us to prayerfully consider the characteristics we possess to address giants. Then we are invited to live life with courage as we know that the giants that visit our lives are big but God who works through us is even bigger. Amen.