

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers

Sunday, July 5, 2026

Friends, this day as we continue in worship and as we prepare to hear God's word read and proclaimed, I invite you to get comfy in your pews or wherever you find yourself worshipping this day. Let's take a couple deep breaths together. Let's take a prayer posture and take a deep breath in and breathe it out slowly.

Another deep breath in and breathe it out slowly. Breathe in God's mercies.

And breathe out God's mercies to others.

Breathe in God's mercies. And breathe out God's mercies to others.

Gracious spirit, you are as close to us as our very next breath. So we pray that you would dwell within us and around us in these moments. That you would quiet any voice within us but your own, that we might hear your word for us this day, and that in hearing we might be called to lead lives of response. So may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

All right, friends. We continue this morning in our Tell Me a Story sermon series that's going to take us through the end of this month, the end of July. Our text this day, if you spent time this morning with it, is from 1 Samuel. It's rather lengthy, but we think it's important for us to spend time reading through the details. We know of the simple outcome of this story, but we don't spend so much time with what it looked like to build up to this conflict between David and Goliath. So we do that this day in reading from 1st Samuel, starting in the fourth verse of the 17th chapter. Let us listen together for God's word to each of us and indeed to God's church.

And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath whose height was four cubits and a span. He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail. The weight of the coat was 5,000 shekels of bronze. He had greaves of bronze on his legs and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed 600 shekels of iron, and his shieldbearer went before him. He stood and shouted at the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine? And are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." And the Philistines said, the Philistines said, "Today I defy the ranks of Israel. Give me a man that we may fight together." When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

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David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth." And David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And whenever a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth. And if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears. This uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God." David said, "The Lord who saved me from the paw of the lion, from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine."

So Saul said to David, "Go, and may the Lord be with you." Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul's sword over the armor. And he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these, for I am not used to them." So David removed them. And then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the wadi and put them in his shepherd's bag in his pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine. But David said to the Philistine, "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 defied. This very day, the Lord will deliver you into my hand. and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and the wild animals of the earth. So that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand." When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

We love an underdog story. We always have. As I was reading this passage this morning, it reminded me of those times before big significant sporting events where the camera goes into the locker room, and the coach is there giving a pep talk to their team. Those middle verses when David stands before the Philistine and tells him what is about to happen. I mean, it had me wanting to run through a wall, right?

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He comes out with confidence and bravado, and yet he is still very much the underdog. We love an underdog story. It's the reason why almost all of us were captivated on Friday evening when Cape Verde was fighting in the World Cup against the number one team in the world.

It's the reason why all of us pay attention, even if we don't like sports, to the upsets that happen in March on the basketball court during March Madness. We love an underdog story. It resonates with us somehow. Yesterday, as we celebrated the 250th birthday of our country, many of us remembered the underdog story that took place two and a half centuries ago. The colonists versus the British Empire. We love an underdog story. It's baked into who we are. And as we read from this passage in 1 Samuel, we get to know the primary, the chief, the underdog story that began all underdog stories. David is the underdog. He is small and young and overlooked. And even though Saul tries to armor him, he can't move. So he is unarmored, and he is facing a terrifying giant.

Everyone who looks upon this battlefield would look at it through the logic of power, of armor and weapons and size and status, and they would fear. But David sees something different. Goliath, of course, is the favorite here. Not the army that is behind Goliath, but Goliath himself. It's this maneuver that the Philistines use. They trot out their biggest and strongest, and they try to bring the fight down to simply one conflict. Goliath is not just a big man, though. He represents other things. He represents empire, intimidation. He represents military spectacle and the assumption that might makes right.

But we know, because we know the end of the story, that Goliath had weaknesses as well. Goliath's weakness is that he believes completely in his own power. He cannot imagine being defeated by someone smaller, younger, less equipped, or less afraid. Goliath's arrogance makes him blind. He is vulnerable because he is overconfident, performative, and dependent. Dependent upon symbols of dominance. Goliath's size is intimidating, but his imagination is small.

Everyone else, including Goliath, sees the battle through the logic of power, armor and weapons, size and status. But David sees something very different. And after talking that talk, he runs toward the line and slings one of those smooth stones that he had placed into his satchel.

And in a moment, he conquers the giant, staging the most famous upset in all of history.

David does not win because he becomes a better version of Goliath. He wins because he refuses Goliath's terms. He will not wear Saul's armor. He will not pretend to be someone he is not.

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Instead, he trusts the gifts that he actually has been given—courage and clarity and faith and a sling that he knows how to use and use well.

Most of us know this story as a story of an underdog defeating a giant and it is that. But if we stop there, we may miss the hidden truth inside the victory of the child over the warrior. Because what I love about scripture is that, especially our Old Testament text that always tells the truth of these heroes of scripture, the story doesn't end with David measuring about 4 feet tall. The story goes on from there. David ultimately ascends to power. He begins as the underdog, but he does not remain one. He becomes king. He himself gains armies and servants and a palace and influence. And eventually, in the stories that we will read later in David's life, eventually in the story of Basheba and Uriah, David uses that power the way that empire often uses power—by taking what he wants, hiding what he has done, and sacrificing another person to protect himself. The tragedy of the story when it begins is that a boy is going to be crushed by a giant. But the true tragedy of the story is that David in time takes on the character of Goliath.

The underdog becomes the empire, taking on some of its worst attributes.

David represents for us all of the nuances of power when we continue to read his story. But he cannot be reduced, even as he grows older and even as he takes on these characteristics of empire. He cannot be reduced merely to a villain. David is a poet. He's a leader. He is beloved, which is what his name means. He is broken. Ultimately, he is repentant. He gives us the Psalms of breathtaking beauty as well as stories of devastating moral failure.

And so there is much for us to learn from this person, this boy taking on the giant. The question, if we read the totality of David's story, is not whether David was blessed. He was. The question is what David did with that blessing. The question is not whether David was chosen. He was. The question is whether being chosen made him humble or whether it eventually made him believe that the rules no longer applied to him.

And that is what we need to pay attention to this day, because what was true for David is also a truth we must wrestle with. What is true for David in the totality of his story can also be true of nations and of churches. It can be true of institutions. It can be true of pastors and parents and leaders. Anyone who has ever been entrusted with influence and power. The great spiritual danger is not simply that one might be crushed by Goliath. The great spiritual danger is that having once defeated Goliath, we slowly become him.

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And that is where the story carries us beyond David. Because David can show us courage, but David cannot save us. David can teach us to face giants, but David also shows us how easily the giant can move inside the human heart. So the good news then does not finally rest in David. The good news rests in the son of David, Jesus the Christ. Jesus stands before empire without fear. He knows who he is. He knows the mission that his father has given him. He comes to set captives free, to proclaim the good news to the poor, to announce a kingdom not built on coercion or domination or fear. And when empire, when Goliath does what empire does, when it mocks him and strips him and condemns him and nails him to a cross, Jesus does not answer violence with violence. He does not become another Goliath. He does not save the world by overpowering it. He saves the world by bearing its sin, exposing its violence, forgiving its cruelty, trusting the power, trusting that the power of God is stronger than the power of death.

We love an underdog story. We love it because of what it represents and the possibilities it holds. Within every underdog story, especially this first and most famous one, there is a caution written into the story and there is a deep hope.

On this weekend, we give thanks for this country, for its gifts, for its promises, for the ideals that still call us to become better than we have been. We also sit with the truth that every David must guard against becoming Goliath. Every nation, every church, every leader, every human heart must be converted again and again from the love of power to the power of love. And thanks be to God that we are not left to do this work alone. For the son of David has come among us full of grace and truth. He has faced the empire, borne the cross, broken the power of death, and set before us, as we will celebrate later, a table where sinners are forgiven and the powerful are humbled and the weary are fed and the people of God are made new.

David can teach us about courage, and we need those lessons in these days. He can teach us about the complexities that all of us hold within our hearts, and we need those lessons in these days. But ultimately it is the son of David, the one that comes in the form of the servant king, the one who bears the weight of the power of empire and shows that the love that was the love that was very present with David on that battlefield so many years ago is present again in the flesh of Jesus Christ and is indeed present with us this day. So may we, may we take heart in the story of David, and may it...may it call us...may it call us to respect and appreciate the power entrusted to our care. May we know and may we believe the power of the living God goes with us in these days.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, mother of us all. Amen.