

Third Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 7) – Year B – June 21, 2009
1 Samuel 17:1a, 4-11, 19-23, 32-49; Psalm 9:9-20; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41
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“Who Moved My Cheese?” is the title of Spencer Johnson’s bestselling book about dealing with change. The jacket by-line suggests that the book’s lessons are relevant to all aspects of our lives, including the spiritual. For most of us, change is about as popular as being audited by the I.R.S. Intellectually, we all know that change is inevitable, but in large part, we put a lot of energy into resisting it or avoiding it. Sometimes because change involves fear of the unknown, and sometimes because we are just very comfortable where we are and don’t wish to be disturbed. Towards the middle of his book Johnson asks the readers an important question: “What would you do if you weren’t afraid?”

Today’s story from the Hebrew Scriptures is David and Goliath. I *almost* wanted to say, “Need I say more?” Almost! This classic tale is shared in every child’s Bible and Christian storybook and emulated in every school yard across the world. Many a parent has probably taught the message that bullies always get their comeuppance if only to bolster a fragile ego, and that the proverbial underdog is really the hero. Many a child has quickly realized that that is -- how shall we say it? -- not experientially or necessarily true, at least in this lifetime. I think it was Bill Gates speaking at a recent commencement service where he shared some of his rules of life who said, “Life isn’t fair. Get used to it.” But does that mean we have to live a life of fear?

Taking the reading from 1 Samuel at a purely face value level, there are several themes, including courage in the face of giant challenges; faith and trust in God, on the part of David; and pride in our own abilities if we identify with Goliath. Like David, you and I have already, or will certainly need to find courage in the face of all that life can throw at us. Being Christians does not insulate us from job loss, illness, or the death of loved ones. We can’t get a hall pass excusing us from rejection, disappointment, relationship issues, or financial difficulties either. However, our faith and trust in God’s abiding grace and steadfast love make a huge difference in how we deal with life in general, and how we help others who face similar situations. Our faith and trust in God empowers each of us to empathetically enfold others with God’s love and comfort. Yet, you and I are also a bit like Goliath – hugely independent and confident in our own abilities, we easily become inflated with self-importance. The internal battle many of us face is pride versus the desire to be a humble-hearted servant of God, surrendering our wills to God’s will. Despite the knowledge that the latter states are more desirable than the former, on any given day our spiritual attire will usually flip-flop between the righteous white robe of gratitude and obedience to God and Jesus, and the multi-colored, wildly patterned suit of radical autonomy. And for the fashion-challenged amongst us, there is one basic rule: white is right, because it really does go with everything!

Not underestimating the value of the most obvious teachable moments from David and Goliath’s story, we cannot neglect to look a little closer, and dig a little deeper. The first thing to note is the sad state of Israel’s first anointed king, Saul. A little background may help us understand his fear in the face of the Philistines despite his success defeating other armies. In last week’s reading from the first book of Samuel we heard how David was secretly anointed as the second king over Israel, after Saul fails to fulfill God’s commandment. The verse immediately following the end of last week’s reading says this, “Now the spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit ... tormented him” (1 Samuel 16:14). Nevertheless, Saul is still the king, but he is a king who is now working entirely out of his own limited strength and resources. The spirit of God has come mightily upon the young shepherd-boy, David, who will become the greatest shepherd king of Israel. His fame as a warrior will spread quickly after defeating Goliath.

Take a moment now to consider who you and I relate to here – Saul or David? As followers of Christ, we too are filled with the Holy Spirit and Jesus is the Lord of our hearts, right? But how well do we keep the Holy Spirit enthroned when it comes to daily life? As the centuries rolled on from the time of David and Goliath towards Jesus and the Roman Empire and in all the years since then, cultural

pressure has led each of us to be extraordinarily adept at compartmentalizing our lives – a concept, along with individualism, that was entirely alien to David and Jesus. By contrast, the Israelites’ way of life is such that there is no conscious separation between their physical and spiritual being and doing in the world. So I ask again -- and I invite everyone to pray about this over the next several days or weeks – if God actually inventoried the throne room of our hearts, who or what would He find there today, tomorrow, or moment-by-moment? Are you and I willing to give our hearts to God for an hour or so each Sunday morning, but take control again by Sunday afternoon, or when we’re back at work on Monday morning? Are we disciples of the Lord 24/7, seeking God’s guidance in all parts of our lives? Or perhaps we have fallen into the modern-day cultural pattern of compartmentalization, where we refuse to allow God access to certain parts of our decision-making, especially when it comes to what? Financial or stewardship decisions maybe? Relationship issues? How we use or abuse food, drugs, or alcohol? What about the kind of movies and TV we watch, or the websites we visit? We can all fill in our blanks here. As a way to get a handle on how we’re holding out on God in our own lives, our first clues probably come when we immediately dismiss prayerful consideration on certain facets of our lives; begin to make excuses; or hear the voice of our own ego that says, “this doesn’t mean me.” Here’s another way to approach our denials. Think of it as a spiritual audit, and honestly report which departments in our lives we are afraid to let God see. Praying for discernment will help us to open our hearts. But it also helps us to understand God’s desire for our lives. This isn’t about punishment. It is all about growing in relationship and transforming fear into love.

Saul is a long way from praying to God on this momentous day in the history of Israel. He sees the physical size of Goliath, weighs his own potential to beat the giant and finds only fear in his heart. David comes along, dismisses Goliath’s commanding stature and Saul’s armor as irrelevant. Instead, he is filled with righteous indignation that Goliath would mock the strength of Yahweh, the one true God. David has something much more important than physical strength, a sword or even armor of bronze. In humility, he does not seek to face Goliath for personal glory. He is an untried teenager, who has never fought in battle, and who proposes nothing in Goliath’s sight. Yet David will not fight alone. He is empowered and surrounded by Almighty God. Goliath doesn’t know it, but he actually doesn’t stand a chance against David, because what is at stake here is much bigger than either adversary. To paraphrase John F. Kennedy’s famous speech, David is not asking what his nation can do for him, for example by acknowledging his status as anointed king over Israel. Instead, David is asking to be the instrument that God will use to show all nations that “there is a God in Israel” – in order to glorify God’s name. As we have already heard, there is no spiritual disconnect for the Israelites: every aspect of life is intimately connected to God.

The more we delve into this epic tale, the more we realize that ultimately David was chosen by God because he let his love of God rule his heart in all the affairs of his life. It is so simple. Yet apparently much easier said than done. According to Johnson, our “cheese” will always be moving. According to the Scripture, our lives in Christ can never stay the same. For those who have not heard the Good News, but are pushed and pulled by fear-driven cultural forces, the question truly is, “What would you do if you weren’t afraid?” For you, me and all disciples of the Lord Jesus, the real question is “How will God use me today to bless this fear-filled world through His steadfast love and grace?” And in the asking may we always remember that we are not alone: with God all things are possible.

Amen.