

- **Saint John's Pulpit (June 20, Fourth Sunday after Pentecost)**  
- "Your Armor? Or In His Arms?" **1 Samuel 17:32-40**

**32** David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." **33** 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." **34** But 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, **35** 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. **36** Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God." **37** David said, "The LORD, who saved me from the paw of the lion and 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!"

**38** Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. **39** 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. **40** 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 the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

### ***Lessons from Two Kings***

Sometimes I used to think about Saul and David and how they served their Israel and God. In many ways, these two characters are really good topics to study and discuss. They had lots of things in common but lived a totally different life.

A careful reading of the Bible makes you know that there was God's intervention to select Saul and David. Only these two kings were chosen by God directly. God used Samuel to find Saul and David and asked him to anoint them. However, from the third king, Solomon, all processes of electing kings were bloodthirsty, period. Full of assassinations, betrayals, and coup d'etat.

As I mentioned before, Saul was so shy when he was called. He had hidden himself among the baggage. But David was hidden by Jesse, his father, because Jesse was so shy to recommend David to be a king. One main reason why we see this lack of confidence upon God's calling was in their physical weakness.

Saul was from the Benjamin tribe. Among the twelve tribes in Israel, the Benjamin tribe was the smallest and the weakest tribe. From 1 Samuel 9:21, we easily know that Saul was not free from this complex.

*21 Saul answered, "I am only a Benjamite, from the least of the tribes of Israel, and my family is the humblest of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin. Why then have you spoken to me in this way?" 1 Samuel 9:21 NRSV*

For David, he was the youngest son among Jesse's eight sons. In the eyes of his father, David was still a little boy! Because of his physical position, Jesse did not consider David as a candidate for the next king after Saul. No matter how the word 'weakness' was their middle name for both Saul and David!

However, a real difference between Saul and David was in their faith and attitude to serve God. The story today deals with how they were so different in trusting God in front of the Giant Goliath! Yes, it makes sense. When we face huge troubles, we get to know how we seriously trust God or not.

### ***Your armor or His arms?***

In front of the Philistine giant Goliath, to see how Saul and David faced it is very interesting. Goliath was their common challenge, but their solution was different. When no one volunteered to fight against Goliath from the Israel camp, David asked Saul to do this battle against Goliath.

To Saul, David's request meant 100% losing game. 0% chance to win. Saul's logic is mostly from what he sees. Please look at 1 Samuel 17:23 again.

*33 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." 1 Samuel 17:23 NRSV*

David was just a boy, and Goliath was a life-long warrior... ironically, in the eyes of Saul, there was no room to see God's mighty hands. How was David? The reality he faced was the same. But David trusted God who can bring a victory to him.

*37 David said, "The LORD, who saved me from the paw of the lion and 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!" 1 Samuel 17:37 NRSV*

Here is a question. When Saul heard this from David, what feelings did he have? Don't you think that it was a wake-up call for Saul to remember his God? Unfortunately, Saul failed to remember God, and turn to the Lord. He is just grappling with his reality. To resolve this dilemma, what was Saul's solution? It was his armor!

When Saul felt that he cannot stop David to fight against Goliath, the first action he took was to suggest David wearing his armors.

*38 Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. 1 Samuel 17:38 NRSV*

Whenever I read this verse, I used to remember the movie *Iron Man*. What was the armor of Saul, the first king of Israel? It looks like Tony Stark's iron man suit! Presumably, Saul deeply depended on his armor, because he believed that his armor can protect him. But he didn't think that God is his savior.

When Saul's armor was offered, what did David do? We all know his choice. The answer is that David rejected Saul's armor and did not carry his weapons. The Bible gives us a very interesting point in explaining why David did not appreciate it.

*39 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. 1 Samuel 17:39 NRSV*

David was not comfortable when he wore Saul’s armor. For David, he was perfectly comfortable when he was in God’s arms! Psalm 23, (I believe this is David’s signature Psalm) undergirds David’s point very clearly especially in its first verse. “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.” His total trust in God made David fight against Goliath without his armor, but he was certainly in God’s strong arms and back up by God’s armies.

What lessons can we find from this story? Are you a person who sticks to your reality? Or are you a person who sees your faith behind your reality? What would you like to bring when you face a giant in your life? With your armors or with God’s strong arms?

This weekend, there was the 239<sup>th</sup> session of the Virginia Annual Conference. It was a virtual meeting. Through joining this virtual conference, I felt that all churches in Virginia Conference are facing many giants these days. Pandemic recovery, growing churches, encouraging congregations to return to their churches, outreaching, fighting against secularism, and the General Conference in a year and lots of ensuing discussions and debates...

Given all these challenges, hope that all United Methodists find a good lesson from the story today. All your armors cannot protect you! Even Tony Stark, Iron Man died in the movie which mans his iron man suit could not protect him. Do you know what Saul’s last moment was when he wore his armor?

*<sup>8</sup> The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. <sup>9</sup> They cut off his head, stripped off his armor, and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to carry the good news to the houses of their idols and to the people. <sup>10</sup> They put his armor in the temple of Astarte; and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan. 1 Samuel 31:8-10 NRSV*

Like David in the story today, let’s trust our Father God and be in His mighty arms. Let our faith defeat our reality. Don’t you think that this is a really good story when we celebrate Father’s Day today? Happy Father’s Day!