

David Goes to Maine
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Westminster Presbyterian Church, Buffalo NY

Let us pray: God, tell us what we need to hear, and show us what we ought to do to obey Jesus Christ. Amen.

A DEA officer stopped at a ranch in Texas , and talked with an old rancher.

He told the rancher, "I need to inspect your ranch. We've had a report that you are involved in illegal activities."

The rancher said, "Okay , but don't go in that field over there.", as he pointed out the location.

The DEA officer verbally explodes saying, " Mister, I have the power of the Federal Government with me !" Reaching into his rear pants pocket, he removed his badge and proudly displayed it to the rancher. "See this badge?! This badge means I am allowed to go wherever I wish.... On any land! No questions asked! Do you understand ?!!" The rancher nodded politely, apologized, and went about his chores. A short time later, the old rancher heard loud screams, looked up, and saw the DEA officer running for his life, being chased by the rancher's big Santa Gertrudis bull..... With every step the bull was gaining ground on the officer, and it seemed likely that he'd sure enough get gored before he reached safety. The officer was clearly terrified. The rancher threw down his tools, ran to the fence and yelled at the top of his lungs..... "Your badge, show him your BADGE!!"

In our scripture reading today, we see examples of how power and authority can be used. Goliath definitely has power, he stands 9 to 10 feet tall and is one of Philistines mightiest warriors. David may not have the physical might and power but David faces Goliath with the authority of God working through the Holy spirit. Whether you have power, authority or both, we see it's how they are used and more importantly, how God uses them through you, that makes the difference.

Modern day society uses the story of David versus Goliath as a reference anytime there is doubt of overcoming a challenge or facing seemingly impossible odds. This famous story from 1 Samuel teaches us a great lesson that we are not alone in facing our challenges. David teaches us that we can defeat any obstacle and conquer any enemy through the power of God.

Just as we are told that David took five smooth stones from the streambed and placed them in his shephard's bag, I have five points or stones to offer our youth as they face their own Goliaths this coming week in Maine. These are my five stones to help you live the mission of the church through your actions next week and beyond. The first stone is to allow yourself to make small changes. So many times we get caught up in the "I'm going to change the world" excitement that we easily get overwhelmed and shut down thinking "but I'm only one person,

what difference can I make?”. You may have heard this story before, but I find that it doesn’t hurt to be reminded of it every once in a while.

[Beach story - make a difference to that one]

David did not go into battle thinking “I’m going to change the world!”. He entered that battlefield to change *his* world, not *the* world. In David’s eyes, he was not doing something that was world changing, just something that he felt needed to be done for his own beliefs and faith. David’s perception was unique and gave him a very faithful advantage.

This brings us to the second stone which is perception. Ancient Greek philosopher Epictetus said “People are not disturbed by things, but by the views they take of them”. David saw this as a dutiful action to defend his faith and God against the Philistines. He didn’t see an insurmountable enemy. He saw an enemy that backed the wrong horse. David perceived Goliath as just another Philistinian soldier waiting to be defeated while everyone else saw Goliath as this 9 to 10 foot “crush you in one blow” type of monstrous soldier. How we perceive things dictates how we react and which action we take.

[Kid in backyard playing baseball alone]

His perception was that the only person who could strike out the greatest batter in the world was the greatest pitcher in the world! So embrace optimism and look at your challenges with different perspectives. Not just through your eyes, but the eyes of someone loved and guided by Christ.

The third stone you can bring with you to battle your Goliath challenges goes along with the saying that you cannot change the wind but you can adjust your sails. David never complained that he had a tough life and that he wished life were easier and not so dangerous. He never cowered or hid behind excuses as the victim of bad luck. If you’ve ever seen or read Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events, the orphaned Baudelaire children encounter so many wicked and dangerous events, it leaves the reader and viewer constantly thinking how unfair the world is to the Baudelaire children. Yet the children never wish life were easier, they just continue to be tougher and more resilient. Think of your faith and relationship with God as an umbrella.

It protects you from the rain but doesn’t make the rain stop falling. It will not calm or dissipate a storm, but will help protect you from getting wet. Yes, you can hide under someone else’s umbrella, but that will only last for so long. You need your own umbrella, you need your own faith and know that under the covenant of God you are protected from the storm!

The fourth stone is to rely on your faith and never abandon it to live under someone else’s faith. David relied on his own faith as his protection. After some hesitation, Saul allows David to accept Goliath’s challenge, and tries to assist. Saul offers David his royal armor; but the gear doesn’t fit, and David doesn’t need it anyway. When we face opposition in life, or some kind of personal battle, we may first rely on our talent or training, or seek someone’s advice; we may

pile on so much help that, like David, we can't move. We then have to let go and trust in God's resources. David walks away from Saul's conventional, protective gear. "Saul's armor" has become a symbol for facing life's challenges with human means. We use Saul's armor when we trust our idols and objects instead of divine enablement. What clutter in our lives do we need to discard? David knows he can't fight Saul's battle in Saul's way. David believed with all his heart, all his soul and all his strength that he did not need to rely on other's faith to protect him as he had his own that he proudly and confidently wore with love. It is perfectly fine to sometimes lean on others who have strong faith but know that your own faith will always be the best protection against your Goliaths.

The fifth stone that I'll give you to sling at your giants and challenges is to keep moving forward. The two armies of the Israelites and Philistines were powerhouse armies of their time and both proud of their accomplishments. They both saw themselves as undefeatable and both believed they were unstoppable. But here we find them at a complete standstill staring at each other and no longer moving forward. We cannot afford to be like either army and stop when we face opposition or challenge. We need to keep moving forward and be like David who walked right out onto that battlefield, carried by the Holy spirit to continue in mission and ministry. Our youth (and a few brave adults) are heading up to Maine for a week on our annual mission trip. They'll spend the week working in hot sweaty conditions, with relatively little recognition of the hard work they are putting in, and as a reward they'll get to sleep on a hard, cold floor, do regular tick checks and spend 12 hours straight in a van packed shoulder to shoulder with their youth leader blasting Hamilton, Phantom of the Opera and other Broadway soundtracks the whole time. They will face mosquitoes the size of your fist and very curious spiders that are not fearful of humans at all.

They'll be dragging downed trees out of the woods, splitting that wood and delivering it to those who rely on wood burning stoves to warm themselves in the harsh winters. They will build roofs, cut lawns, paint houses and churches, install drywall and whatever else the town of Hartford needs them to do. I'm sure they'd rather be at the pool, or going to the beach, sleeping in or spending all day at the mall; or maybe working a job that pays money. But they are giving up all that glory, all that fun, all that money – and sacrificing themselves to make their world, their community a little bit better. They are not stopping to stare at the enemy and hesitating to keep moving forward in Christ's ministry. For over forty years our youth have made sure that the faithful and obedient David goes to Maine as God's servant. And we should be very, very proud of them for that.

But something else should come to mind as well... Are only our youth called to be like David? What about the rest of this congregation? When I had to think if Westminster as a whole are acting like David, it only led me to one word - absolutely!! Our single church reached out against all odds and proudly opened their hearts as a More Light church. Our loving congregation is an inter-faith connected church teaming up with Temple Beth Zion, Congregation Shir Shalom and the Muslim Public Affairs council to effectively battle against racism, intolerance and segregation. We've permanently and positively affected the Westside

of Buffalo with the Ferguson Avenue project, ENERGY after school program, West Side Bazaar and other amazing projects that WEDI has taken on. Westminster has been a community leader in so many ways and has created a very strong foothold in Western New York.

The question is, can we do more? Time has become the number one precious commodity over money and materials.

The answer is we cannot afford to slow down or stop our mission! We cannot stop moving forward and we need to keep growing our community outreach even further and faster. The mission of the Church is, in fact, Mission. Our youth are set to embark tomorrow morning on THE most important activities of our Church. Mission and ministry. As we hold these youth in prayers – praying for a successful mission trip and a safe return, let us also pray for our journey as a congregation to never slow down or stop preaching and acting in the Word of God! I am so proud and honored to be part of this Westminster family that holds mission and ministry so dear to our hearts. I brag about us any chance I get to anyone I can. Let's make a promise to keep moving forward and using the five stones I've given you today let's slay giants, overcome challenges, let God use our talents and gifts and set up Westminster so that every person who ever comes in contact with us says "Wow, that Westminster Church in Buffalo is truly our David on the battlefield!!". Amen!!