

Message for June 27, 2021

1 Samuel 17:1-11, 45-50

Even though it was written back in 1963, the children's book entitled "Where the Wild Things Are" is still very popular. It tells the tale of a little boy named Max who was sent to bed with no supper for misbehaving. Wearing his wolf costume, Max, in his imagination, got into a boat and went off to the land where all the wild things were. While there he triumphed over all of them, and after that he returned home and had his supper. The story is very simple but even so, its appeal to a child is tremendous. We adults may like to think of childhood as being a time of innocence and happiness, but childhood can also be a frightening time too. Everybody and everything is quite literally so much bigger than a child and sometimes life may seem to be full of wild and frightening things, but in this story the little boy triumphed over all of them! For a young child, this story is one of hope and reassurance. In the words of a literary critic:

"I didn't have to ponder why my children loved this story. It was about the dreaded figures that terrify children when the light is turned off and they are in bed, and playthings take on an ominous spectral form. To confront these nocturnal fears, to stare them down and make them friends; this had to thrill young hearts."

But of course this is just a children's book isn't it, and it has no real meaning or relevance for us adults. Unlike the kids, we know that there are no 'wild things' lurking in the darkness; or are there?

The truth of course is that our lives are filled with 'wild things' that cause us unease and even fear. There is the 'wild thing' we call death, be it our own or a loved one's. There is also ill health, whether it be our own or a loved one's. Sometimes we worry about our family, our friends or what the future may have in store for us. Some people worry about the big things in life too such as what the world will be like in the future with such as climate change for example? Life can be full of the 'wild things' for both children and adults alike and that helps explain why today's scripture passage is both so well known and even loved.

As I wrote in last week's message, the prophet Samuel had, against his better judgement, anointed Saul to be the king. While Saul looked very much

like a king though, appearances were deceiving, and he was an absolute disaster. God then told Samuel to anoint the young shepherd boy David to wear the crown. David however was so young and it would be years before he could take the throne. Saul then, very ineffectively, continued to rule.

As it happened, the Philistines had launched another invasion of Israel and their army was perched on top of a hill while Saul and his men were perched on another with a valley separating them. The armies were posed for battle but nothing happened; all they did was camp on their respective hills and glare at one another. This however was perfectly understandable. We live in a world where warfare is rather remote, and we can think of the recent conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians for example. The Palestinians launched their rockets at Israel while the Israelis responded with air strikes. Modern warfare is largely impersonal, but such wasn't the case in the ancient world. Back then, armed with such as swords, spears, bows and arrows, a person had to get close to the person they were trying to kill. Also, contrary to how they are depicted in movies, most battles weren't free-wheeling affairs either. Rather the soldiers formed a shield wall, which can be compared to the linebackers in a football game, only armed with weapons. The soldiers pushed, stabbed, and kicked the men in front of them. This was absolutely terrifying, and it took a lot of courage to go into the shield wall and stay there. Not surprisingly perhaps, most of the soldiers simply didn't want to do it and so every king hesitated before starting a battle. Would his men muster up the nerve to fight and outlast the soldiers of the opposing army? Possibly not, and that is why Saul and his army remained perched on their hill while the Philistines sat on theirs. No one could muster the nerve to go into the valley below.

The kings and generals of the ancient world were of course well aware of the reluctance of their soldiers to fight and so they came up with a solution. Rather than have all of their soldiers fight, why not have each side pick their champion? Those two men would fight and which ever man won meant that his side was victorious! And this is how many wars and battles were resolved; by what we would call a duel.

After enough time had passed, this is how the Philistines proposed to resolve matters. Day after day their champion, a man named Goliath, descended into the valley and dared an Israelite to come and fight him. Day after day though all of the Israelites declined the challenge and it's hard not to

blame them; why Goliath was ten feet tall! His armour weighed over 150 pounds and his spear was huge too! If it took courage to go into the shield wall, then it took even more courage to take on this monster! And so Saul and his army unhappily sat on their hill listening to Goliath taunt them day after day. Then David showed up.

David was far too young to join the army and had been kept at home to look after the sheep. One day his father sent him with food for his brothers who were serving with Saul. David happened to be there when Goliath came out and offered his daily challenge, and David couldn't believe it! Why wasn't anyone willing to take Goliath on? Since no one else would fight him, he announced that he would; after all God was with him! Quite understandably Saul wasn't thrilled with the idea of entrusting the fate of his kingdom to a mere boy but then again, what choice did he have? David was equipped with armour and weapons for the upcoming duel, but he very quickly realized that far from helping him, they were much too big and heavy. Instead, he went out to fight dressed in his normal clothes armed with nothing more than a sling and stones.

Goliath was less than impressed when he saw David; was this the best the Israelites could do? After the ritual taunts and insults, the two approached one another with Goliath anticipating an easy kill. Before Goliath could get too close though, David pulled out his sling, whirled it around his head and then let a stone fly. The stone struck Goliath just below his helmet's brim and killed him instantly. David quickly ran up, took the dead man's massive sword and chopped off his head. Inspired by this, the Israelites then poured down their hill to fight, while the Philistines, dismayed by their champion's death, turned and fled. The Israelites won a tremendous although unexpected victory and it was all because of David and his conviction that God was with him.

So goes the story of David and Goliath which is, despite its violence, one of the best known and best loved stories of the entire Bible. One of the reasons why this story is so popular is because we all love stories where cunning triumphs over brute force, good over bad, and the underdog over the bully. Indeed this story speaks to us because sometimes we, like David, are confronted by the Goliaths of the world. Our Goliaths of course come in many different forms. One Goliath for example may be trying to deal with unreasonable people, those whose main job in life seems to be to make our lives miserable. There can also be the challenges of illness, and I am sure that

all of us can easily come up with other Goliaths in our lives. What ever form they may take though, they all share one thing in common; they fill us with dread and fear. Even so, the message of today's scripture passage is that we, like David, can take heart; we can simply because God is with us, and with him beside us we truly have nothing to fear. I like the way the preacher William Willimon put it in a sermon from several years ago:

“This story is not meant to be argued, explained or picked apart. It's meant to be asserted, enjoyed, retold by people who know what it is to be little, on the bottom. When it's you turn to stand and confront Goliath you can face the 'giants' in the name of the God who loves to make winners out of losers. None of these bullies is a match for God.”

The truth is that none of the Goliaths we face in life are a match for God. No matter where we are or what we are up against, we can take heart. As the words of this psalm remind us:

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in times of trouble.
Therefore we will not fear.
The Lord of hosts is with us,
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Pastoral Prayer

We give you thanks this day, this first Sunday of summer, for the goodness and beauty of your creation all around us, your creation that reminds us that you are God and that there is none other like you. We thank you too for what summer means for so many of us, even as the pandemic continues; a time of rest and relaxation. With this in mind, we pray for the well being and safety of all.

As we look ahead to Canada Day later this week, we give you thanks for this nation in which we live. With the discovery of the remains of 751 Indigenous children in Cowessess this past week, we are so aware of the gulf between what our nation aspires to be like and the reality of what we have done in the past. We pray for all who attended the residential schools and their

families. We pray for peace and reconciliation; that we may, as a nation, society, and individuals, learn and grow from these tragedies. Grant that we may be better and do better.

We acknowledge today that as we make our way on life's journey, we are often confronted by what we may call the 'Goliaths' of life. Sometimes we may like to think that we are so brave and faithful but, all too often perhaps, we are not as brave as what we think we are. Forgive us for our fears and help us to put our faith and confidence in you, secure in your love and forgiveness at those times when we act more like King Saul and his men rather than your servant David.

We pray this day for all who are ill and all who mourn, remembering all devastated by the collapse of the building in Miami. We pray for all those who even now, as things open up, are finding it so challenging to cope with. Grant us and your children everywhere the courage, strength, and peace that only you can. We ask these things in your Son's name.

Amen