

<b>Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2015</b> <b>Cathedral, Grahamstown</b> <b>7.30 &amp; 9.30 a.m.</b>		<b>4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost</b> <b>12<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year B</b>
1 Sam 17:3-4, 32-49	Ps 9:9-20	2 Cor 6:1-13
		Mark 4:35-41
<b>FACING THE ENEMY</b>		

“David replied to Goliath, ‘You are coming against me with sword, spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the Israelite armies, which you have defied.’ ”  
(1 Sam 17:45)

“The Lord is a strong tower to him that is oppressed: he is a tower of strength in a time of need.” (Ps 9:9)

## **Our readings**

Happy Fathers’ Day to all our fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers!

Our scripture readings during the Green season, the Sundays between Trinity and the beginning of Advent, invite us to go on a journey of discovery and discipleship: a journey of discovery as we see how God’s love and grace has worked in the lives of those he has called; a journey of discipleship as we find out for ourselves what it means to follow, and to trust.

During the seasons of the church year, such as Christmas or Easter, we expect to see how the readings for each Sunday link up and tell the same story – the story of the birth of Christ (Christmas); the story of the resurrection (Easter). But during the Green season, there is quite deliberately no single theme that links the three scripture readings. Each reading is following its own particular story of faith.

At the moment, in the Old Testament we are reading through the book of Samuel – the story of the prophet Samuel, and the first kings of

Israel, Saul and David; in the New Testament we are reading parts of 2 Corinthians, St Paul's letter to the church in Corinth; and our Gospel readings are from Mark.

It's a bit like opening the Sunday Times and turning from page to page – society weddings and scandals, crime and corruption stories, murders, the sports section, business – you take your pick and read what catches your interest.

The story of David and Goliath is probably one of the best-known of the Old Testament stories. Israel, under the rule of Saul, was facing possibly the greatest threat to its existence – the army of the Philistines, with their huge champion fighter, Goliath, a giant of a man, seemingly undefeatable, invincible, overwhelming strength, with a physique and armour to terrify any normal human being. But along comes David, this young man, full of energy and faith, but completely out of his depth, it would seem, to face a giant and to save Israel. David is not afraid. When King Saul offers him the use of his own armour, David puts it aside – it is too heavy for him, he is unable to move. Instead, he uses his familiar weapons – a sling shot, a few stones, and his rugged faith in God who has never yet let him down.

He advances upon Goliath. Goliath finds it hard to take him seriously, and laughs at him, threatens him “Come on, and I will give your body to the birds and animals to eat.” (1 Sam 17:44) – but David is not afraid. He answers: “ ‘You are coming against me with sword, spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the Israelite armies, which you have defied.’ ” (1 Sam 17:45)

He puts a stone into his sling shot, finds the gap in Goliath's armour, and kills him. Goliath, the mighty warrior, is no more. The rest, as they say, is history. David becomes the hero of Israel, gradually overshadows Saul, and in due time is made the king.

David the warrior was also David the psalmist, the poet, the person of prayer. Years later he wrote:

“The Lord is a strong tower to him that is oppressed: he is a tower of strength in a time of need.” (Ps 9:9)

## **David the person of faith**

The story of David and Goliath has been an inspiration to warriors and fighters, and to people of faith, for centuries. It is the story of the weak standing up against the strong; the oppressed rising up against the powerful and the oppressor; the bully being overthrown and defeated; the person of faith overcoming in the face of great danger and in the midst of his enemies; the small nation standing against the mighty armies.

It is the story of the young giving inspiration and courage to the entire nation; the story of a young person setting the example for his elders. It is the story of how one man saved the day by his bravery and courage, and by his faith.

It is a story of faith and courage, which people have returned to again and again. How can the weak face up to the strong? How can a young boy face a bully at school? How does a youngster face the gangsters when they demand protection money? How can we stand up against someone when they push us around, when they have overwhelming force, when they are much stronger and bigger than we are?

For David, it was his faith in God that carried him through. He looked at Goliath, he saw his armour, his strength, his size, his superior strength, his age, his experience as a warrior, but he was not intimidated, he was not silenced, he did not run away.

“The Lord is a strong tower to him that is oppressed: he is a tower of strength in a time of need.” (Ps 9:9)

The month of June is often referred to as Youth Month, taking its name from Youth Day, June 16<sup>th</sup>, which was this past week. June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1976, marked the outbreak of what was then known as the Soweto riots, and then spread throughout the country – a great uprising of young black people in protest against Bantu education, and against the entire system that sought to keep them as second class citizens in the land of their birth. Today, in the year 2015, Youth Day and Youth Month is a time both to remember those events of 1976, and also to reflect on the opportunities and challenges – the Goliaths - that young people face in South Africa today.

## **Facing our dangers**

What are the Goliaths that we face? Who are your Goliaths? Your giants? Your overwhelming, terrifying enemies? Who or what are we facing that is working against everything that we hold dear, that has the potential to destroy us? We see them and they strike terror and fear into our hearts – who are they? What are they?

For some, Goliath is a person. It may be a neighbour that is aggressive and unpleasant towards us, or who threatens our children. It may be an intimidating colleague or boss at work. In some of our communities, it may be a gang leader, demanding protection money.

In some of our schools, the Goliaths are the violence on the playgrounds and even in classrooms, bullying, initiation, gangsters on school property, the sale of drugs. We need people to be David, to stand with our youngsters in their fears and danger, and to confront and face down the Goliaths that threaten to overwhelm our children.

We face the Goliath of racism and hatred, tragically highlighted this past week by Dylann Roof, a young white man in the US, who entered the historic black Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Charleston, USA, on Wednesday evening this past week, shooting nine people, in what seems to have been a hate crime against black Americans. He had appeared on facebook wearing a jacket with

the old SA flag, and the old Rhodesian flag; he had spoken of his hatred and fear of black people.

In many of our communities, young people face the Goliath of unemployment, the Goliath of gender-based violence, and many live under what has been called a “blanket of hopelessness”.

Bredasdorp is a town in the Western Cape where three girls have been violently and brutally murdered over the past two years: Anene Booysen, 17, who was raped and disembowelled in February 2013; Kayde Williams, 5, who was raped and killed in February 2015; and Elda Japhta, 15, who was found dead under the bed of her 29-year-old boyfriend last month, in May 2015.

A recent study done in the Bredasdorp community highlighted the level of gender-based violence, especially on the role of men in relationship violence. Some responses from young men, in discussing the possibility of young women ending their relationships, included the belief that a girl-friend needed to be punished if she cheated. Revenge “in whatever form” should be taken, and the man may “date and have sex with her sister, cousin and her best friend – she won’t do that to me.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, the reverse does not apply.

I wonder what results we would find if a study like this was done here in our local community. Many of our young people face the Goliath of unemployment, and many, especially our young women and girls, face the particular Goliath of gender-based violence.

We face the Goliath of alcohol and substance abuse. We wonder, with sadness, what role alcohol plays in the many road accidents and deaths that occur on a weekly basis, and especially during holiday time. We have a culture that seems to find it ok to drink and drive.

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<sup>1</sup> News24, 20<sup>th</sup> June 2015

Our Goliaths are the blatant rejection of the Constitution, and the law, in our own country, as the Sudanese President Omar Al Bashir was allowed by our government to come and go, in violation of the warrant arrest out for him to face charges of genocide and murder. Our Goliaths are the authorities of our own municipality, who appoint and employ people in key positions without adequate qualifications, and in defiance of national legislation.

As we face all these Goliaths, who are our Davids? And what are the stones in our sling shots?

Our Davids are the young people who choose to be different, our young people who choose to remain sober, our young men who don't abuse or rape or murder. Our Davids are our parents who love and care for their children. Our Davids are our grandmothers who visit their grandchildren in jail, who care for the babies that their children bring home.

Our Davids are the pastors and leaders of churches who love and care for young people, and who journey with youngsters through their bumpy teenage years.

Our Davids are the people of Charleston, in the US, who gathered on Friday night, black and white together, to say to one another and to the world, that the terrible actions of one young white racist will not destroy us, and will not break us. Our Davids are the family of those who were killed, who expressed words of forgiveness to Dylann Roof, and asked him to repent.

Our Davids are groups like the Makana Civil Action Group, which is challenging the municipality and exploring legal action to bring them to account.

Our Davids are those who attempted to have President Al Bashir arrested and face trial.

The stones in our sling shots are the stones that David carried in his heart: his courage, his faith, his trust. His belief, which is ours, that God is with us, that God gives us the will to do what is right, that God sustains us through the dark times, that the Lord gives us the vision to see a society where Goliath has been defeated and overthrown.

Our Davids are all of us when we do not give up or give in, when we keep on going, when we struggle on in the face of disappointment and opposition, when we persevere through despair and bitterness and anger. Our Davids are you and me when we continue to hope, when we continue to love, when we continue to reach out, when we continue to forgive. Our Davids are you and me when we continue to build, to raise up, to heal, and to create.

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## **CONCLUSION**

May God bless us as we continue to face our Goliaths with the faith and courage that God gives us.