

I love this well-known story of David and Goliath. I remember well, learning it first in Sunday school, but this is not just a children's story. In fact, I learned that one has to be careful when telling this story to children. I was invited back in London to go to a local nursery school, kindergarten three and four-year-olds. And they asked me to tell them about David and Goliath. So, I really got into it. I was enjoying it. And I was at the point where David took Goliath's sword and I was leading up to a bloody crescendo. And I could see one of the teachers called Jeanette going, "No, no, stop, stop." She knew where I was going, but it was too late. The sword came up and as I told the story, Goliath's head came off in one blow, blood spurted everywhere. And the kids started to go very quiet and pale. And I realized that perhaps I had gone a bit too far in the telling of the story. I was never invited back to that particular nursery school.

Anyway, I'll reign myself in today and I do want to address the story again because I say this is not just a children's story. This story has a lot to teach us about life. What we've heard read was the edited highlights. And I'm going to include in the telling of the story bits that don't make it into the reading, which is still I realized a rather long reading that we had earlier. So let me begin by just filling in a bit of background and context to the story because it's important to recognize the obstacles that David had to overcome before he even got to square off against the giant Goliath. David was the youngest of eight boys and his older brothers, all of them had gone off to fight Goliath and the rest of the Philistine army. And they left David at home with his father, Jesse, to look after the sheep. And David only gets to the front because Jesse asked him to take some supplies to his brothers and it is as he was dropping off the supplies that he heard Goliath issue his terrifying challenge to the army of Israel.

Goliath asked for a man to fight saying, "Let's get on with this army, let's just keep it between two of us, save the rest of the people getting involved." And he was a huge man, full no doubt, or covered with very thick armor and the army of David's brothers heard this challenge and fled. They were scared, but David paused and asked, "Who is this? Who is this, who threatens the army of the living God?" Now, such talk didn't go down well with David's older brothers. We

hear that Eliab said to him, "Why are you here little brother, you should be looking after the sheep. I know the wickedness of your heart." You might recognize this experience. David had people close to him telling him unhelpful and indeed untrue things. They tried to put labels on him. Eliab, David's brother called David conceited and wicked. He wasn't, but they still said it.

It may well be that we feel mislabeled, that things have been said about us, which are hurtful and which aren't really true. When I was five, I got my first ever school report. It included the immortal line, which I've shared before, Mark is a big and clumsy boy, a phrase that haunted me throughout my childhood and adolescence. Every time I would drop something or knock into something, I'd no doubt hear someone saying, "Well, of course, your first teacher was right. You're a big and clumsy boy." Who knows what would've happened to me if I hadn't been given that label. I could have ended up being a ballet dancer. I doubt it, but you never know. Anyway, it wasn't nice. Now, that's a frivolous example. You might have your own example of things that have been said to you, labels that have been put on you.

David overcame these words, his heart wasn't wicked as his brother had suggested, in fact, the Bible says that David was a man after God's own heart. He didn't let what other people say about him, hold him back. And it wasn't just his relatives that he had to overcome. He went to see the King Saul and the King wouldn't have won any prizes for encouragement either. He said to David, you can't fight Goliath. You're just a boy. So even before David got to face the giant Goliath, he had to do battle with his brother and the King. Too many of us wouldn't have got past these hurdles. We'd have listened to the negative voices around us before we listened to the voice of our heavenly father. This is what God says to each of us, not the negative babbling that we so often hear. We read this in Isaiah, we can claim this first for our own. God says of his people, "Now says the Lord, he who created you, he who formed you, fear not for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine."

David knew that, he allowed himself to be molded by God and his promises to him, not by the negative

voices of others. And that's why he was able to take on this huge challenge of facing Goliath. The King Saul was eventually persuaded to let David take up Goliath's challenge, but not without trying to get him wear his armor, big armor, and a huge bronze helmet. David wasn't comfortable in the armor. In fact, he could barely walk in it. He took the armor off and armed himself with something else. He picked up five smooth stones to go with his sling. David went into battle with a sling and stones. Now, I want to say this isn't as crazy as it first sounds. There are people who think that faith and actions like this are completely irrational. It's stupid, it's like going to fight a heavily armed giant with a feather duster, but that's not quite what's happening here.

David doesn't simply say, "Well, God will protect me and head off into battle with his eyes closed." He had the experience of fighting wild animals and he arms himself with a weapon that he's comfortable with. And David knows that he's much more nimble than a giant in heavy armor. This is not a story of God doing the impossible. It's a story of a young man who trusts in God using the skills and gifts that God has given him. God has a plan and a task for each of us as he did for David. And if we're to complete that task, we must arm ourselves and use the tools and gifts that God has given to each of us. David went to get five smooth stones.

What about us? What do we need to reach for if we're to do the task that God would have us do? What skills do we have that God can put to use? Too often we worry about what we don't have, or we worry about the size of the giant in front of us, or we wish we were someone else, but each of us has a task unique to us. And we all have gifts and skills, which are unique to us. As I've said, it's important to note that David went out to confront the giant without being reckless or stupid, but he was trusting. He did think God will take what I have, this sling and stones and with that, and with God's help, I will slay this giant. He knew he would win because God was with him. He says, "This day, the Lord will hand you over to me," to Goliath.

There's a French philosopher called Paul Ricoeur, who talked about what he called the second naivete. When we're young, we're naive and trusting. And

then we grow up and we see the dangers of being naive and trusting and we easily get so cynical and distrustful. Faith is about learning to trust again. We can't ever trust like we did when we were a child when we had that first naivete. But through faith, we can learn to trust again as an adult and develop a second naivete. That's what David is doing here. He's not simply being naive or reckless. He doesn't rush at Goliath unarmed. He takes care to arm himself and trust God to do the rest. That's the way of faith, it's to do what we can with the skills that we've been given, at the resources at our disposal, and trust God to do the rest. When St. Theresa ... she was laughed at when she said she wanted to build a great orphanage and all she had was three shillings. She answered, "With three shillings Theresa can do nothing, but with three shillings and God, Theresa can do everything."

When we try to solve our problems on our own, using our own knowledge and skills, it's like the King Saul putting his armor on David. It's grown-up and sensible, but it's not right. The right thing to do is to trust God and use the gifts that He has given us. When David saw Goliath coming at him, he didn't panic or focus on Goliath's size. He didn't focus on Goliath at all, but rather on God and his righteousness and God's might. The army of Israel forgot to look at God, and they saw only the problem. They prove the truth of the saying, "Worry doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength." Let's allow this story of David and Goliath to renew our strength. Let's learn the lesson of David who trusted God to help him fight with giants. We all face giants of one kind or another. Let's like David not focus on them, but instead focus on the God who is mighty and strong to say, "Amen."