

Some of you may remember the old Bill Cosby routine, where God speaks to Noah and says, “Noah, build me an ark.” (Cosby responds, “Who is this *really*?”) God is not side-tracked, however: “Make it three hundred cubits long and fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high.” And Noah responds, “Um...what’s a cubit?”

Well, the answer is that a cubit is the distance from your elbow to the end of your middle finger (or about eighteen inches.)

Today we heard that Goliath was six cubits and a span tall. Now that you know what a cubit is, you may be asking, “so what’s a span?” The answer is that it’s the distance from the tip of the thumb to the tip of your little finger with your hand spread wide apart. Six cubits and a span would make Goliath just shy of ten feet tall. Some of the ancient manuscripts, however, say Goliath was “only” four cubits and a span; that would put him at something like six foot seven, which is still tall, but far more realistic.

On the other end of the spectrum, it’s a bit unclear how big David really is. I think in our mind’s eye we tend to see him as a kid of maybe twelve or thirteen—but he could just as easily be seventeen or eighteen; the text doesn’t tell us.

These details are really not the point of the story, however, a story that I suspect everyone here has heard before today and a story where the point is fairly obvious. Goliath represents power and strength as the world understands it. Even if he’s only six foot seven, he may still *seem* like he’s ten feet tall because he is perceived as so utterly invincible. In contrast, David represents youth and the courage to confront evil even against apparently insurmountable odds.

Most of us have more than enough of experience with giants crushing the little guy and sadly that experience only grows over time. In fact, it seems to me that a subtext of this story is that David is too young to know any better. The older we get, the less likely it is that we will take on giants—we just have too much at stake. And yet the fact is that this only makes them loom even larger.

This story survives in the Bible as a word of “good news” to suggest that sometimes it is otherwise, and that with God all things are possible. The story touches us at a deep, mythic place that is bigger than our Christian faith—and yet it goes to the very heart of our faith as well. What sports fan isn’t moved to tears by the film *Hoosiers*, when a small-town basketball team from Milan, Indiana takes

on the big guys and wins the state championship in 1954? Or *Miracle on Ice*, the story of the 1980 men's hockey team that defeated what was then considered to be an unbeatable team, the Soviet Union. Or (since I'm on a roll with films) what about *Class Action* or *Erin Brockovich*?

Of course all of those films are based on real life and it is in real life where it matters most that people take on giants. Do you remember the image of that brave Chinese student standing in front of the tanks in Tienanmen Square twenty years ago this month? Not to mention the people of Iran taking to the streets these past two weeks to insist that their voices be heard and that giants must not be allowed to be bullies forever.

This story is universal. And yet it goes to the heart of the good news we gather here to proclaim week after week. It's easy for us to forget, however, when we leave here and head back to work where the big banks get bailed out and the little banks are left on their own; where the deck seems stacked for the rich and the powerful and the well-connected and the system feels rigged. The central image of our Christian faith is the cross: a symbol of weakness and a scandal to the world. And yet that instrument of shameful death changed the world; it has become for us the means of life. It fundamentally challenges the way that we think about power.

Goliath's power is about brute force and military might and domination. David's power is about truth and hope and courage. It's about believing in something enough to take on entrenched power. It is about a willingness to speak up, to stand up and be counted. It's about *heart*.

We heard St. Paul telling the church in Corinth this morning that his heart was wide open to them. He implores them to open wide their hearts also. That is what our faith is meant to do. It's not a head trip. It's not about getting a ticket out of hell or into heaven when we die. It's about how we live our lives, here and now; Christ came that we might have life and that we might have it abundantly. Christ came that we might have heart. (And of course, the word "courage" is directly related to the heart as anyone who has studied French or Latin will remember.)

So Saul tells David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine. You are just a boy." Think about how many times in human history this has been said. You can't do that; you are too young. You can't do that, you are too black. You can't do that; you are too female. You can't do that; you don't have the credentials. You can't, you can't, you can't...

Over time we may start to believe that life is about what cannot be done. Very often, however, it's the voice of youth that says "why not?" It is the voice of inexperience, the voice of faith, the voice of hope that says, "you just watch me." So David tells Saul: *I've killed lions and bears, and I am not afraid of that Philistine.* David has heart.

Margaret Mead said, "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." The same can be said of the Church. It's easy to be critical of the institutional Church and I'm as good at doing that as anybody. Sometimes the institution feels concretized in a past that has little to do with us. Sometimes Christians seem not just as petty but more petty than our neighbors and just as prone to sin. We get caught up in the small stuff and there's a lot of small stuff to get worked up about. *But never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed Christians can change the world...*

This old story many of us learned in Sunday School is about something really big and it's the antidote to what ails the Church in our day. What the Church needs more than anything else, I think, is heart. We need courage to become the change we want to see in the world. And it's as basic and primal as standing up to the bully in the schoolyard. There will be a hundred people to tell you as David was told that it can't be done. But something happens even before David puts that stone in his slingshot. We've seen it again this week in the streets of Tehran. There is power in one. And the power to speak up will always win over the power to force silence. The power to stand for something will always win out over the power to lie down and settle for the status quo.

So let me just ask you this: what can one little congregation in one little diocese that is a part of one relatively little denomination do for Christ and Christ's Church? Maybe not a lot. But we'll never know until we try.

You and I are not in control of our success but we'll never know what power we have if we don't show heart. And all that I know about God, and Biblical faith, suggests this to me: that as we live more fully into God's call to us to be the Church at this time and in this place we are quite likely to discover that with God's help, we can do infinitely more than we can ask or even imagine.