



A Time for Action

1 Samuel 16:11-13 and 17:17-50

Planting

Goal: To consider the message that God would have for us from 1 Samuel 16 and 17 as referenced.

Purpose: To consider how God might have us empower and direct young people in faith journeys.

Suggestions: Read the scripture references from several translations. Talk about the story with young people in order to hear their interpretation of the story. Intentionally invite young people to participate in this Bible study.

Background:

We come into this scripture text as Samuel is asking Jesse about his sons. God has sent Samuel to find a successor to the current, very unsuccessful King of Israel, Saul, who has been selfish, uncaring, and unresponsive to God's intention for him and his reign as king of Israel. As the king of the nation, Saul has fallen out of favor with God, and as a result God instructs Samuel to search for the person who will replace Saul.

As you'd expect, Samuel is a bit reluctant to follow God's instruction to begin the search for a new king; but after some hesitancy and pleading with God, Samuel responds to God's instruction, going to Bethlehem, where he finds Jesse, the father of eight sons, the youngest of whom is named David.

In addition to being the youngest son (an adolescent) David is an expert shepherd and described in several Bible commentaries as handsome, intelligent, and obedient, a great musician, and a person able to exercise good judgment. Upon meeting David, Samuel anoints him at God's instruction and *"the spirit of God enters David like a rush of wind empowering David for the rest of his life."*

Later on in the scripture text we find David following the instructions of his father to leave his sheep in the care of someone else so that he can deliver food to his brothers in the impending conflict between the Philistines and the Israelites. When David arrives on the battlefield he encounters Goliath of Gath who is challenging the Israelites, and hurling insults at both God and God's people. David overhears the rants of the giant challenging God and God's people, and volunteers to silence the Philistine.

When David tells King Saul that he intends to take on the giant, the king advises David that he is much too young and inexperienced to beat the giant. Undeterred by King Saul's estimation of his ability, David explains to the king that he has been shepherding his father's sheep for years, and that the God who has delivered him from the lion and bear will deliver him from this Philistine.

As David leaves to confront Goliath, King Saul offers David his blessing and his full-sized suit of armor as a means of protection; but instead of donning the armor David picks up his sling-shot, five smooth stones, along with his staff, and prepares to silence the giant.

As David approaches the giant he very intentionally announces to Goliath and all of those within hearing distance, Israelite and Philistine alike, that the battle about to be waged belongs to God, as does the victory over the giant. And with his very sure faith in God, one single stone, and his ordinary sling, David kills the giant, silencing the dishonoring voice of the Philistine and proving God's faithfulness to the people.

Tending

Share some of the ideas presented and respond to a few of the relevant questions posed after each idea

There are so many things about this familiar story that stand out, but the most significant idea for me is God's abiding faith in young David and David's abiding faith in God. Even though David is very young when he is anointed by Samuel and when he encounters Goliath, God entrusts and empowers David to do really big things.

David's close relationship with God and his openness to God's holy calling defines David's life. If we just take a glance at the Psalms, authored by the young David, we see that David recognizes the presence of God in everything around him. In direct contrast to the disappointments of King Saul, who fails to hear or respond to God's intention for his life, David delivers the promise of hope as a result of his close relationship with God.

David characterizes an eagerness to be in relationship with God. He enthusiastically tends both his father's sheep and the needs of King Saul at God's bidding. He is greatly blessed with many abilities and David is eager to defend the God of Israel against this "big-bully" named Goliath. There is no plea from the king or the army for David to take on the giant. David volunteers his service eagerly and without any hesitation.

David is very much in character with many of the young people I've known in the church through the years. Like David, many of them are excellent students, intelligent, caring servants, and willing workers, who are eager to make a difference in the world for God's sake. Many of them are looking for opportunities to teach, preach, serve, and to discover what God has in store for them in their journey of faith. The question to the church is whether or not we are equipping young people so that they feel able to respond to God's intention for their lives.

1) Talk about the gifts the young people in your life or your congregation has to contribute. MAKE A LIST OF THEM. Discuss how your church/community invites and empowers young people to identify and use their gifts/talents in service to the community, the church, and God's Kingdom to come.

David uses the skills he has developed over his young life to serve God and to fulfill God's purpose for his life. David's musical talents serve him well in his care of King Saul, and his proficiency with the slingshot is an excellent tool for protecting his father's sheep and, as it turns out, in defeating the giant. Just like David, young people today have skills that are serving them well in their lives. They are using their unique skills in dealing with many of the same giants/challenges that confront adults in our churches, workplaces, and homes.

2) Consider some of the "giants" that confront us today. MAKE A LIST OF THEM. (The "giants" might include: a lack of leadership, over commitment, judgmental attitudes

toward peoples' race, age, economic standing, an unwillingness to change, the need to control all outcomes...) Talk about the ways that young people you know deal with the giants that are mentioned in your discussion. Are there ways we can help people deal more productively with the "giants" in today's world?

The David we come to know in this text is obedient to his father and to God, a pattern that repeats itself over and over again in this story in relationship to David. When he is called in from the fields to meet Samuel, when his father sends him to serve King Saul, and when he is sent to deliver food to the battlefield there is no indication of David's reluctance or hesitance to obey. In each case, David simply prepares himself and responds to the call placed before him. In direct contrast to David's obedience in this story we meet a fallen king who is disobedient and a reluctant servant named Samuel, who's eventual response to God's call changes the course of history in the anointing of young David.

3) In your experience, how open are people to being obedient to God? What does it mean for each of us - young and old alike - to be people who are obedient to God's call in our lives? How can we (*the church*) make it more possible for young people to respond obediently to God's presence in our lives? (NOTE: This is not a discussion about young people's obedience of authority, but rather a discussion of our collective ability, at every age, to be obedient to God's intention for our lives.)

When David volunteers to take on the giant, King Saul (*who, by the way, has been waiting for 40 days for someone to step up and fight Goliath*) tells David that he was too young and inexperienced to beat the giant. But unhampered by King Saul's estimation of his ability, David explains to the king that he's been shepherding his father's sheep for years, and that the God who has delivered him from the lion and bear will deliver him from the Philistine. I can just imagine a young man teaching a king about the God who delivers his people from danger and despair. What an awesome witness from a brave young man with a strong faith in a powerful God.

4) Do you or your church act out of a belief that young people are just too inexperienced to have anything to contribute, or is there openness to the contributions of young people? How does your congregation, presbytery, or family honor the fact that God entrusts young people with gifts to be exercised and developed in the service of God?

In the case of taking on the Giant, David is more concerned with doing God's work and proving God victorious, than in simply beating the "bad guy". David does not volunteer to silence the giant for the sake of a battle or to prove himself a great fighter, but rather David believes that it is God's intention to silence the giant. In that belief, David finds the courage and strength to respond to God's call on his life to take action. David trusts God to do God's part, and he does not sit idly by waiting for God to make all things right. David could have gone home from the battlefield and prayed about the situation, gone to the temple to ask the high priests what to do, or simply asked God to make it right by changing the hearts of the Philistines. And perhaps he did all of these things as part of his preparation for the battle, but more significantly, David took action. He strengthened himself in the Lord and prepared himself to confront the giant.

5) How does your family/church prepare young people to respond with concrete actions to do God's work of Kingdom building? List some ways you/your congregation can help to prepare young people to partner with God to confront their "giants" in concrete ways.

Along with his blessing of “*God help you,*” King Saul offers David his full-sized suit of armor as a means of protection against the giant; but instead of putting on the king’s oversized, out-of-date, and antiquated armor, David picks up his sling shot, five smooth stones, along with his staff and his sure faith in God, and prepares to silence the giant. It is significant that David chooses not to wear Saul’s oversized, out-of-date, antiquated, and cumbersome armor. It doesn’t fit David very well! While the armor may have worked well for King Saul, David knows himself well enough to rely on his own strengths-not Saul’s. David trusts in his own God-given gifts and talents along with his faith in God to confront the Giant. Through his faith in God and his reliance on his unique God-given skills, David is able to do something no one else is able to do. David’s abiding faith in God and God’s abiding faith in David allows the young man to step out in faith, employing his talents in ways that are unique to only him. A mighty big lesson taught by a young person of great faith about believing in God and acting on that belief.

6) How are the young people that God has entrusted to your care, and the care of your congregation, through baptism, finding a place to practice and embrace their unique abilities and talents for God’s purposes in the church, their communities, and God’s Kingdom to come?

Harvesting

So what does all this mean for us today?

God trusted young David with really big responsibilities, but God also empowered, prepared, and equipped David for his ministry. David’s relationship with God was strong, intimate, and engaging. Today’s church must be intentional in its efforts to provide opportunities for young people to come to know God in this same way. God calls us into relationship with the Son and the Holy Spirit, but God also asks us to go beyond only believing in God, to acting with God, as an agent of transformation.

God entrusted many important efforts to David, and David trusted God to do what God would do in those efforts. David does not sit idly by waiting for God to make things right. As exemplified in David’s life, **God does not call us to simply “go” to church – God also calls us “be” the church.** Are there risks, dangers, conflicts, and disappointments involved in responding to God’s call? Sure there are. But God has gifted people with unique skills and talents to be exercised and developed in the church so that those same abilities can be shared in the world which Christ came to save, and Christ calls us to follow his example in taking down the “giants” that confront us.

David trusted God to be with him in all things, he prepared himself for the battle, used the gifts and talents that God had entrusted to him, and he took action believing that the battle, and the certain victory, belonged to the God. **We should remind ourselves constantly that the same powerful and loving God who made a way through the Red Sea, who sent the manna from heaven, and who empowered young David as he silenced the giant, is acting on our behalf today to ransom all of God’s people.**

Celebrating the Bounty

Now what do we do?

Covenant at this meeting to be in touch with a few young person in your church and encourage them in their challenges. Whenever possible remind your congregation that young people need a place to exercise their God-given talents and abilities so that they might become proficient in their work of Kingdom building. Remember that youth bring gifts that are uniquely theirs and

that they are not simply to wait and watch the elders while they wait their turn to be involved in the future church. It is the task of believing families who make up the church to honor the voices and the gifts of the young people entrusted to it for nurture, development, and spiritual growth.

Prayer: *God remind us of the serious nature of our congregational and individual responses to the covenant made during the sacrament of baptism, to nurture the young ones you have entrusted to us in the spirit and practice of the faith. Soften our hard hearts when we act like King Saul, ignoring your claim on our lives and the lives of our loved ones. Allow the example of the young David to come to mind when we are looking for a fresh inspired word from you about where to find answers to “the giants” that confront us. Bless the young people who are looking to us for direction and guidance. Give them persistence and resilience in their pursuits as they deal with the “cumbersome armor” that they often encounter. Thank you for the example of David, the obedient son of Jesse, and the eager giant-slayer, who inspires us to action on God’s behalf. Help us to encourage and equip the young ones who might rise up to show us the way of truth and faith through their close relationship with you, and their intimate awareness of your intention for their lives. In your holy name we express gratitude for your plan for us at every age. AMEN.*

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