

When I was in seminary and an intern at my first church, one of my weekly responsibilities in church every Sunday was to lead the Children’s Moment. Because I was in seminary, the rule was also that I had to work with whatever passage of scripture was being preached on that day. I think this was their way of messing with the interns. You always hoped it was going to be someone else’s turn on the week they beheaded John the Baptist. But on the week it was David and Goliath, every intern wanted to be up to bat. David and Goliath is like being in the slow pitch cage at the batting cages—you’ve got all day to see the ball coming, it’s a nice easy lob, you’ll be able to hit this one out of the park no problem. Am I right? Who doesn’t know that David and Goliath is a story about how God uses little people to do big things? Even non-Bible readers know this. When CEOs try to sell big ideas on little budgets, when parents try to build up the confidence of their children to go out for the team, what metaphor do they reach for? David and Goliath.

So there I was, on the steps of the chancel with a bunch of little people. I had all the predictable tools for telling a great story. “And David pulled out 5 stones.” I pulled out five stones and gave each one a name. “This one is doubt, this one is fear, this one is you questioning your size, this one is the mean name your best friend called you last week, and this one is your itty-bitty faith in God.” “And David put a stone inside his sling shot.” And I took the stone of itty bitty-faith and put it inside a rubber band. “And David went out to meet Goliath, who was ten times the size of David and twenty times the size of David’s stones, and with his stone of itty-bitty faith, David took Goliath down.” And I unleashed itty-bitty faith up the center aisle. It is not the greatness of your faith, but the greatness of your God that counts! End of story.

The idea, of course, is always to send us out with more than what we came in with. Having knocked the story out of the park, every kid, and hopefully every adult who was in church that day, could now go home feeling 10 feet tall.

But then Monday rolled around. In seminary, Monday was meet with your intern supervisor day. Mine was the Reverend Peck-Reeder. To this day, Nina remains one of my dearest friends and best colleagues, and this despite the fact that I think she always took a little too much pleasure in messing with me.

“So, how did you feel things went yesterday with David and Goliath?”

“Great! The kids seemed intent, my rock illustration went well, I didn’t hit anybody, and I got the point of the story across.”

“What would you say is the point of the story?”

I gave her this look, you know, kind of like the one I’m giving you now, the kind of look that says, Duh. “Who doesn’t know what David and Goliath is all about? It’s about God using the little people.” There was an uncomfortable silence in the room, and I knew she was gearing up to mess with me. “Have you ever thought about why the story got written down that way?”

“What do you mean, why the story got written down that way?”

“I mean, have you ever thought about why the writer of First Samuel chose to include this particular story about David, and to tell it the way they do?”

Honestly, the question had never crossed my mind before, and I don’t know why. We know that back in the 3rd and 4th centuries, when the church fathers were sitting down to discuss which books to include in the biblical Canon, there were plenty of books they chose not to include. Books like Judith and Baruch in the Old Testament, and the Gospel of Thomas, and the Gospel according to Mary Magdalene in the New Testament. Some religious traditions, like the Roman Catholic Church, chose to hold on to some of these books, but they too dismissed some as not authoritative, not close enough to the truth, and those were put on the back shelf. Even in the parts of our Bible that did make the cut, we have four gospels, each unique and different in the way it tells the story of Jesus. Luke doesn’t include everything John includes, who doesn’t include everything Matthew includes. So why does the writer of First Samuel choose to include the story of David and Goliath, and to tell the story the way they do, as one that is about little people besting big people?

Have you ever thought about how we tell our story? As individuals, as a town, as a church, whether we realize it or not, we are always telling a story about who we are. We are always making choices about what parts we put in, and what parts we leave out, and it goes without saying that perhaps no one has the full story on us, including us.

About 10 years ago, I came across an obituary in the local newspaper about a man whose family had nothing good to say about him. "Our dad was a mean man," it read. It went on to say that he never worked an honest day in his life, that he was an abusive alcoholic, that he never spoke a kind word to a stranger, not even to a friendly one. On and on it went until the last line, which read, "God love him." I think this is what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote, "Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I am fully known. And now faith, hope and love remain, these three; and the greatest of these is love." It is the last great act in our lives, to believe in the impossibility of love.

In the case of David, the last line of his story reads, "No sword for David!" With just a sling and a stone of itty-bitty faith, he took down a giant. No sword for David! What an end! Well, we know that's not the end. Three chapters later in First Samuel and David is now a man about to head into battle again, only this time he doesn't reach for his sling and a stone; he reaches for a sword, and not just any sword. Chapter 21, verse 9: And David said, "Give me Goliath's sword." Apparently, on the day David bested Goliath with no sword, he also left with Goliath's sword.

Now I'm not saying this isn't a story about the power of little people and little faith, but I still remember what Nina said to me on that Monday morning, "Sometimes we tell our stories honestly, and sometimes we tell our stories in such a way as to make the honest parts not seem so bad." So David, the man who grew up to commit adultery and then cover it up with murder, who learned to kill in battle with a sword, can also be remembered as the boy who once upon a time slayed a giant with no sword at all.

Years ago, I read "The Glass Castle" by Jeannette Walls. It's a true story about a husband and wife who, despite their great capabilities in this world, deliberately choose to raise

their children homeless. In one chapter, their daughter is arguing with her idealist mother, who refuses to see the bad in people. “What about Hitler?” her daughter yells. “Tell me one good thing about Hitler.” To which her mother replies, “I hear he was kind to animals.”

This past week, I was on my Facebook page when a video of a baseball game popped up on my screen. It was game 5 of the 2001 World Series between the Tampa Bay Devil Rays and the New York Yankees. The video, which was being sponsored by the Yankees, had a caption that read, “An all-time great game!” I remember watching this game back in 2001. It was the bottom of the 9th, two outs, and Tampa Bay was up 2-nothing, when Scott Brosius hit a two run-homer that sent the game into extra innings, where the Yankees went on to win. Of course, you baseball aficionados out there know that ultimately the Yankees would go on to lose the World Series in 2001. You also need to know that I’m not a Yankees fan, I’m a Red Sox fan. So the video made me laugh. I mean, who do these Yankees think they’re kidding? 19 years later and we’re just going to pretend now that the only thing which matters is that we won game 5?

I sent the video to my friend Bob down in Virginia, who is a Yankees fan. “What do you think of this?” I wrote in my message. He replied, “What is Facebook doing sending you Yankees videos? Are you a closet Yankees fan?” he asked with an exclamation point! And that’s when it hit me. Facebook doesn’t know I’m not a Yankees fan. All they know is that once upon a time I watched a video of a Red Sox/Yankees game with Rowan, and now they think I might be a Yankees fan. And that’s when it really hit me: history will be determined not by which side we played for, and whether we won or lost, but by our ability to see ourselves as still belonging to the other side.

Listen well my friends, this *is* a sermon about the power of little people and itty-bitty faith, about what can happen when we refuse to let big people stand out in the world barking orders, committing holocaust, puffing themselves up by tearing others down. It’s a sermon about the ultimate value of such things, and how easy it truly is to take such things, and such people, down with just a sling and a stone, if we would only go confront them. But most of all, this is a sermon about our story, all our stories, and how important it is for us to keep faith in each other, because if we’re honest about it, we’ve all kept a few swords as

trophies, we've all let our arrogance get the better of us at times, we all have chapters of dishonesty. But in the end, the most honest thing we can say about anyone is also the most redeeming: God love them.