

Possible Dreams
1 Samuel 17:1-48
(The Story of David and Goliath)

Preached by Carolyn Bohler
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August 28, 2011

Thank you, Tommy Lee Jones, for your wonderful telling of the Scripture story today, the best known of all the stories about David—an epic story about a young boy who has *enormous courage, barely any fear, and amazing faith in God*.

I'll add a few more details. As this story begins, David is a *shepherd* who is shuttling back and forth from his flock to the battlefield, carrying messages and supplies. David has three older brothers who are soldiers. When he's at the battlefield, he overhears the soldiers discussing the challenge put forth by what is described as a huge Philistine¹--to fight one Israeli soldier—until death. The side to which the last man standing belonged would receive all the soldiers of the other side as servants! So, if the Philistine killed the Israeli challenger, *all* the Israelites would serve the Philistines, or visa versa. No Israelite man was eager to go up against this giant of a man—reported to be 4 to 6 cubits tall, which is somewhere between 6 ft 9 and 9 ft. 6 inches.

David's older brother, Eliab, sees David quizzing the soldiers about the rewards of the challenged fight and accuses his kid brother of potentially abandoning his sheep, to which David responds with the ancient equivalent to “Who asked you?”² King Saul hears about David's inquiries and calls David. Since David is not exactly intimidated by bigness *or* authority, he is not in awe of the King; in fact David speaks first when he goes to King Saul.

Whew and how he does speak! It becomes apparent that David has amazing rhetorical skills as well as extreme faith! David makes the case that shepherding is an occupation with many dangers, that he has fought lions and bears to save his sheep, and that all of the credit for his success goes to God. God who has helped him thus far would surely help him to fight that big Philistine. With that plea, David gets the job.

It is apparent that the Philistine would be covered head to toe in armor. *The Philistine would be both armed and armored*. David declines extra instruments of attack, saying that he trusts in God against all possible odds.

Imagine for a moment being that Philistine. You expect a strong adversary, and you see, coming toward you a boy with a sling shot. This big man taunts and even curses David, but David seems calm and confident and gives a second brilliant speech. Again, David voices *his confidence in God's power to deliver*. Interestingly, David's speech is intended not only for the Philistines, but also for David's “own side,” the Israelites. He's basically challenging everyone: **What gives here? In whom do we trust: Arms and size or God?**

It was just as Tommy Lee Jones showed us, this famous fight *In the Valley of Elah*. (That's the name of the movie this scene is taken from.) As soon as the fight is over, the Philistine soldiers disappear—they don't want to be the servants of the Israelite armies!

Tommy Lee Jones tells the boy named David in this movie that the biblical **David conquered his fear. The big lesson of this story is that David was not intimidated by human power** or by what looked to most like layers upon layers of *security* surrounding this giant Philistine. **David was not afraid, mostly because he believed in the power of God, but also because he knew himself. We might call him naive, or we might call him a leader.** *He took what seemed impossible to every other soldier and made it a possible goal.*

What are our dreams? What are our goals? Our BIG dreams and BIG goals.

Are our dreams and goals based on fear, smaller than we might dare dream because the really big dreams seem impossible? Or, are our dreams and goals based on faith in God, possible because *we believe God wants those dreams and goals and is working alongside all who dare to dream of their possibility?*

About a month ago when I was in Orange County to visit a dentist, I was driving East on Irvine Blvd when I noticed an enormous truck, really one of largest trucks I have ever seen, turning left onto Irvine Blvd, heading West. There were only two large words on the side of the truck: BEST BUY. The driver seemed to be having problems. The truck was barely moving, as it made its left turn, and traffic was backing up. I was not slowed down, for I was going the opposite direction; however, I was becoming judgmental about the truck and the driver. I thought to myself, “Why do we make things so big? Why do we allow such grotesque trucks on the road?” I even brought Jesus into my reverie: “This is exactly what Jesus referred to as needing bigger barns for more stuff.”

Then, I, too, came to a crawl; I began to barely move. Why? Because I saw what the driver had seen—a Mother Duck and five ducklings crossing Irvine Boulevard, looking fairly nervous, but continuing the walk with cautious persistence.

I melted inside. There I was, berating the truck, the driver, and even our culture of bigness, when in fact the truck driver was being attentive to a duck and ducklings who were jay-walking.

I thought then of a graduation speech which really affected me. It was given by the President of Cornell University in 2005—but it was so insightful I actually still remember the main points. To be accurate, I checked out the notes I took at the time, because even then I thought it was sermon material. He spoke of two things he said we should avoid: “tunnel vision” and “rushing to judgment.” “Tunnel vision,” he said, is fueled by fear and despair. When we are afraid of other people, really afraid of them, we start putting labels on them. (For example, the Philistine becomes “A Giant.”) His other point was that we “rush to judgment” when we observe something and then come to a conclusion that is just not correct, if we had more evidence.³ When we do that, we are not able to incorporate contrary evidence.⁴

I “rushed to judgment,” blaming the big truck; my assumptions had not included a belief in a tender-hearted driver who knew that his big truck could protect the ducklings from other drivers who might not see them...

David basically challenged his fellow Israelites, and the Philistines, for having “tunnel vision.” Both sides had visions which were limited by fear; they could only see the need for security, for armor and armies; David had a much **bigger vision**, based on trusting God.

An event that was reported in the news over a year ago also led me to take notes-- The radio news report is another story about expanding tunnel vision; it is a story about a man who *faced his own* "rush to judgment."

The events took place in Basrah, Iraq. The man telling the story was a Sunni. He was a leader in the Iraqi government. In fact, he was the public face of the Iraqi security plan and a former professor. However, he was a Sunni who had been living in a Shiite neighborhood for five years.

One day about 40 Shiite Militiamen came to his house and took him away. They took him to the neighborhood Shiite Mosque. He said he recognized them all. They didn't even cover their faces. His captors moved him from one house to another. They were very polite. They even tried to be generous, to make him comfortable.

This Sunni government official reported that most of the houses where he was held were very very very simple. (He used that many "very's.") He said, "They were very very poor, haven't ash trays, or a table. They live in grinding poverty, drinking not clean water."

This official explained that during those 115 hours of captivity, he thought of "many things like, family." Then he said something close to this: "We are always looking for *security*. Our strategy is always looking for *security*, not for *peace*. We need *peace* more than *security*; we need jobs and schools, education... We need to rebuild our society... These people have nothing to do, no future; they feel they are not *secure*. They haven't hopes."

When released, this man, whose job was to work for *security*, did not want to arrest the men who took him captive. He knew them all; it would not have been difficult, but he would not order the police to go after them.⁵

We could say that this Iraqi official realized that he had had *tunnel vision*, fueled by his fear of Shiites, for he was a Sunni. His *job* was to work for *security*, for heaven's sake! But while he was in captivity, his *assumptions were challenged*. He realized that he had "rushed to judgment," and even though his job was for *security*, he was talking on American radio in order for the world to hear that *security* should not be the **goal**. He challenged all sides, "Go for *Peace*. *Peace* in the neighborhood; that is what should be sought." His plea sure made an impression on me!

We have been at war all the three years I have been in ministry with you. I have sometimes thought it difficult to talk about anything else while people are fighting and dying half way around the globe. When we have our own loved ones there, we cannot forget; however, strangely enough when that is not the case, we do sometimes forget even that we are at war. We pray for *peace*. That is our dream, our goal. Yet, I'm inclined to think that even as we hold out the goal, *peace with justice*, it is easy for us to assume that peace is *impossible*—so we begin to alter our dream somewhat, we lower our goal; we are tempted to settle for *security*.

Peace with justice would cost huge amounts of faith and take a huge amount of time. *Peace* in our current conflicts would require face to face talks between peoples who are filled with assumptions and have some tunnel vision. If we held out the dream of *peace, as a possible goal*, we would have to let a little of the biblical David rub off on us. We would, collectively, need *enormous courage, barely any fear of others, and amazing faith in God*.

The Apostle Paul's faith was as big as David's. He told the Corinthians what we have often heard: "Live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you."

Where did Paul get that faith? He followed, of course, Jesus, who sought a dream that he believed to be possible. That dream of Jesus was not "security." It was peace. We do not call Jesus the "Prince of Security," we call him the Prince of Peace.

No matter what our BIG personal goals are, they are probably more likely to be POSSIBLE DREAMS if we let go of some fear. The Iraqi government official recommended *not giving up* on peace. His argument was that *Peace is a realistic goal, one worth working toward. No matter what our BIG personal goals and dreams are, they are probably more POSSIBLE as we seek God's wisdom to know what is realistic, and then, if we sense a Divine-go-ahead, we don't give up.*

Whether it is peace in the world or achieving a worthy big personal dream—may we take our lead from the biblical David, who showed *enormous courage, barely any fear, and amazing faith in God—enormous courage, barely any fear, and amazing faith in God.*

Roger Duffer sings *The Impossible Dream*

Pastoral Prayer:

Consider a worthy, positive goal or dream you have—it may be a goal regarding a relationship, health, professional goals, discernment what responsibilities to take on, volunteer opportunities, a goal or dream you have for loved ones, for our congregation's ministries, for our city, state, nation, or world. Let yourself reflect upon the rightness, the goodness, the timing of this goal. If you sense a go-ahead....

As you consider this goal or dream, imagine God joining you and whoever else is involved.

As you consider this dream or goal, ask yourself if fear is getting in the way. If it seems wise, allow some or all of that fear to melt away...or visualize others loosening their fear.

As you consider this goal or dream, allow yourself to grow in courage. Imagine yourself courageous. Visualize your courageous self or courageous group facing up to the good and positive goal.

We thank You, God, for helping us to dream dreams and to discern our goals, for empowering us with enormous courage, and letting us have barely any fear.

In the name of the Prince of Peace, Amen.

¹ Biblical scholars point out that David killed a Philistine; Goliath was killed by another... (cite)

² (Revised Interpreter's Bible)

³ He actually said we are tempted to see a pattern emerging, and we infer too soon an organizing principle that is not there

⁴ Cornell University President, graduation speech 2005

⁵ [Sun April 6th, Lourdes Garcia Navarro reporter]