

To Be Confident – 1 Samuel 17:38-40

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Today's second lesson is from 1 Samuel, and it's from the famous story of David and Goliath. This story is so familiar that it's part of not only the Biblical narrative but really our cultural narrative. When we look for a story that illustrates overcoming long odds, sometimes impossible odds, we reach for this story.

The young boy, David, goes up against the Phillistine Goliath (several times his size and strength), with weapons that far outmatch what David has. It's an underdog story that always resonates—in the context of sports, business, or even personal struggles against daunting challenges.

It gives hope that victory can be attained when the odds are long. When David uses one of his five smooth stones and slings it into the forehead of the giant, killing him, it raises the hopes that such victories can occur for all who are far overmatched in strength and resources whatever their challenge.

I'm not going to read the entire story this morning because it is so familiar. Instead, here's just a few verses from within the story. David is preparing for his encounter with Goliath.

Verse 38 begins: "Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul's sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, 'I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them.' So David removed them. Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his

shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine."

With the exciting finish of this story — David's stone plunging into Goliath's forehead and taking him out — this side note from verses 38-40 often gets overlooked.

Saul was determined to give David the best chance possible for success. So he assumed (and David initially did too) that his own equipment would be best for David — his helmet, his coat of armor, and his sword. However, David quickly realized that he couldn't even walk with all that on. So, he shuns it and decides to go with the weapon he knows best: the five smooth stones tucked away in his pouch and the slingshot to propel them.

(Speaking of slingshots, a student brought a slingshot to algebra class one day and launched a piece of gum at the teacher. The slingshot was a weapon of math disruption.)

Anyway, regarding Saul's armor, David said, "I cannot walk with these, for I am not used to them."

It was all foreign to David. He had to go with what he knew best and what fit him.

In addition to believing that it's possible to overcome huge challenges against what appears to be much taller obstacles, David believed in himself and in the tools he was familiar with and skilled in using. Shedding all the armor and simply relying on a few stones he carried in a simple shepherd's bag, and his talent in using them, gave him the chance to be successful in this daunting confrontation with the giant.

At such an early age, David was self-aware. He was aware of the talents he had, the resources at his disposal, and what would work for him. And he was aware of who he was not — an adult trying to fit into adult armor and weapons.

One night this past week, Joey and I were home, and I had turned on The Andy Griffith Show.

And on this night, one of the best episodes of the show was on. The town of Mayberry had a community choir, and suddenly the choir was without its best tenor. And the director was scrambling to find a late replacement in advance of a competition the choir would soon be in.

Well, deputy Barney Fife (notorious for not being self-aware in so many aspects of his life), volunteers to join the choir. Everybody, except the director and Barney himself knew that Barney was not a good singer.

So, the director has Barney join the choir but in the first rehearsal realizes that Barney couldn't sing. So, everybody now has a dilemma: how do minimize Barney's voice but not hurt his feelings.

Andy, of course, eventually comes up with a solution. They would give Barney the solo parts and put him in front of a microphone. And Andy told him that he couldn't sing louder than a whisper because that mic would be so hot that it would boom his voice throughout the hall. In reality, the mic would not be on at all and, instead, a really good singer from the choir would be backstage in front of another microphone that was on. So when the solo parts came around, Barney would hardly be making a sound but would hear the voice of the good singer backstage and assume his microphone had transformed his voice into this amazing instrument.

And of course when Barney first hears this amazing sound, he thinks it's his voice and really gets into delivering the solos. And he has this dramatic bow at the end, and everybody was spared his voice that was more than a little off key.

Barney had an extreme lack of self-awareness. And it ended up putting him into a situation that was more than a little uncomfortable for everybody around him.

If each of us is self-aware, if each of us knows what it is we're good at with the talents we've been given and are honest with ourselves about it, we have the best shot at doing incredible things.

David had that. He knew he was more fit for a slingshot and five stones than for Saul's armor. And it made it possible for him to slay Goliath.

His self-awareness gave him confidence. He was familiar with what he was good at, comfortable in his own skin. And that caused him to really be fearless when he stood in front of a daunting opponent.

As churches go, we also have to recognize where our talents lie. We have to be self-aware. What are we good at? Are we using our talents? Or are we trying to use talents we don't have for a particular type of ministry that's really out of our lane?

It's a tough balance we have to find: taking risks for the sake of the gospel but also not veering off into areas we don't have the gifts or resources for.

We all want to do big things within our ministry. Our elders, especially, want to propel us to another level of effectiveness as a church. We want to have impacts on par with other churches that are doing big things. And we should be aggressive in our ministry. But not at the expense of veering too far "outside our lane."

We don't want to be like Barney Fife. We want to be like David—confident in the talents and resourcefulness we've been given.

Another thing David had going for him in his confrontation with Goliath was his trust in God. Not only was he comfortable in his own skin, with his own resources; he was also confident in the fact that God was with him in this quest.

David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel.” He believed that God would be the one to deliver Goliath into his hand. And that result would be proof to others that the God of Israel was real.

David trusted God. And that trust, combined with a reliance on his own identity, allowed him to come up big in his battle.

In this famous Gospel story from Mark, the disciples are rightly worried that the boat they’re on is going to capsize due to the storm. Meanwhile, Jesus was sleeping soundly through it. When they woke him in fear for their lives, he rebuked them for their lack of faith after he calmed the sea.

Jesus of course was confident that things would be ok. And he implored his followers to exemplify that confidence by trusting in him.

We’re more likely to overcome long odds through our trust in a God who will always have our backs. And that trust in God is a green light for God. Our trust is a sign to God that we are ready to receive what God can give us—his grace and love forever.

A healthy self-awareness and a large dose of trust in God can give us the confidence to do good things—some of them even extraordinary.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt is famous for many things, including this strangely lovely and memorable phrase: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” These were not

simply historic words about courage, they were words that generated courage. Hearing them did not merely convey information about being confident in the face of fear; hearing them evoked that very confidence, created a world where that boldness could be possible.

By being self-aware and by trusting in God, we can be confident and therefore overcome the fear we are at times so fearful of.

And good things are then likely to happen.