

11.12.2017 Trinity 22

There are times when the most difficult part of writing a sermon for Sunday morning is figuring out how to begin. When I'm having trouble getting the ball rolling, I'll often look back over the last few years to see if I've ever written a sermon on the Scripture readings appointed for the day. If I find one, the content doesn't always help me get started, but what is always fascinating about reading these sermons is their ability to take me back in time. Reading a sermon that I wrote a few years ago is, for me, like reading a page from an old journal, or perhaps finding a letter written to my wife when we were still just dating. Sermons from years past provide a written snapshot of the thoughts of my heart at a particular moment in time. Not really knowing where to begin as I sat down to write my first sermon as a priest in God's Church, I decided to take a look back, and found a sermon that I'd written just before I was ordained a Deacon. This sermon was an assignment, and the assigned topic was: "Discuss your call to ministry." For just a moment this morning, step back in time with me, and consider this introduction to a sermon written four years ago. Here it is:

*The Gurkhas are a group of people from Nepal, and are at the center of an urban legend that speaks on the value of having an attitude of fearlessness and complete commitment as we set out to accomplish those tasks that are of greatest importance. The Gurkhas are renowned as fearless fighters. One day, during a war, they were asked by a commander of one of their allies if they would be willing to jump from airplanes into combat. The Gurkhas didn't understand what was involved, but they bravely said they would do it, asking only that the planes fly slowly over a swampy area and at an altitude no higher than 100 feet. When they were told that their parachutes wouldn't have time to open at that height, the Gurkhas replied, "Oh, you didn't mention that we'd have parachutes!"*

*That's the fearless commitment I want to display in my personal ministry, and in my life as a Christian. When God calls me to enter His battlefield, I want to echo the words of David as he faced Goliath (1 Samuel 17), "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head... and the whole world will know that there is a*

## *God in Israel."*

That introduction paints a vivid picture of my thoughts at that time regarding this call to ministry. Like a Gurkha, I didn't care if I had a parachute, just get me in that fight. Like a small, young shepherd boy named David, it didn't matter if the giant I faced was 9' tall and equipped with all the best weaponry. I intended to strike him down, and to cut off his head, and from a certain perspective, on the day of my Ordination, by the grace of God, a giant was defeated. We have reason to celebrate that victory, but as we look back on the journey, we can also see the story of David and Goliath in a new light, and as part of a much larger narrative. Isn't it true, that often the story of David and Goliath is told as if it's the entirety of David's life. It goes something like this: A young shepherd boy named David, who had great faith, went out onto the battlefield to meet a giant named Goliath. Through the power of God, David used a sling and a single stone to cut down this mighty man of war. The End.

The Sunday school version of that story is often the first thing (for some maybe the only thing) that comes to mind when we think of David, and so we draw a quick parallel to the giants in our lives, and assume all we really need to do is to step up in faith and slay those giants in the power of God. Here's the problem: If you read all of David's story, you'll find that he confronted many giants in his life, and he wasn't always victorious. I've also found in my own life, as I strive to confront every trial in the power of God, I'm not always victorious, and so, I've become convinced that David's story, and our story, is not about defeating every giant, but instead, through an intimate relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, allowing these trials to form us into the people God created us to be, a people, like David, after God's own heart. The giants in our lives, no matter what they are, must be confronted with the knowledge that God uses these experiences to prepare us for a day we have not yet seen, and a victory that we can only imagine.

The day that David met Goliath on the battlefield he came armed with faith that was formed through trial. When speaking with Saul before he went out to face Goliath, David pointed to his trials, and God's faithfulness in those trials, as the reason he was prepared to enter this battle. David told Saul that he had kept sheep for his father, and when there came a lion, or a bear, that

took a lamb from the flock, *“I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God... The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine”* (1 Samuel 17:34-37).

Only a man whose faith had been tested could speak so boldly: *“The LORD who delivered me... will deliver me.”* Every trial we face strengthens our faith and equips us for what comes next. That is why James, in his epistle, tells Christians to: *“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing”* (James 1:2-4). It isn't easy, and encountering trials with joy doesn't come naturally, but I know that we can all think of painful experiences in our lives that have helped us to mature and have prepared us for even greater challenges. That was David's experience as well. Wrestling sheep out of the mouths of lions and bears doesn't sound like a circumstance to consider all joy, but as he looked upon the giant, Goliath, there is no doubt that he was joyfully thanking God for every experience that prepared him for that day. From our finite, limited perspective, we can't always see the benefit of challenging times, but our faith is the evidence that God is preparing us through these experiences to do infinitely more than we could ever ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

If our desire is for God to prepare us, to use every difficult circumstance and every step of our journey to form us into His people, then we must live every moment in union and communion with Him. We witness this constant communion with God in David's example as well. In Psalm 144 (1-2), David wrote, *“Blessed be the LORD, my rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle; He is my steadfast love and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield and He in whom I take refuge...”* The intimacy between David and his Lord is unmistakable. In just two short verses, six times David uses the word *“my”* to refer to God. My rock, my love, my fortress, my stronghold, my deliverer, my shield. It is in that type of intimacy that our Lord transforms every trial, redeems every struggle, and uses every

experience to make us “*perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*”

This was true 3,000 years ago for David, and it’s just as true for us today. In the days following the unthinkable tragedy that occurred last Sunday in a small Texas church, I read a quote from the pastor who was traveling the day half his congregation and his teenage daughter were murdered inside the walls of that church. When a reporter asked how he makes sense of this tragedy, listen to the word he uses to refer to God. He said, “I don’t understand, but I know my God does.” My God. Through every step of our journey, at the time of our greatest trial, in the hour of our death, and on the day of judgement, may those be the two words on our lips: My God. May we rely not on ourselves or lean on our own understanding, but only on an intimate relationship with the Maker of Heaven and Earth, our Heavenly Father, who loves us so much that He gave His one and only Son to suffer, and bleed, and die on a cross that we should not perish, but have everlasting life.