

1 Samuel 17:32-49; Psalm 130;
2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

This is the weekend when there is a group of fellows from Trinity who are off hiking in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Last night, George Enney of that group reminded me of the mantra for backpackers, which is “take care of the ounces, and the pounds will take care of themselves.” Because, when you have to carry everything that you will possibly need on your back, you want to go as light as you possibly can, and it tends to be, though, the little things that trip you up – ‘oh, that fifth pair of socks doesn’t weigh very much; and this neat little tool barely weighs anything; I can handle the few extra ounces of that book I’ve been reading’ – and before you know it, you’ve got several extra pounds there in your backpack (which is also the reason I don’t go backpacking any more, because I’m not very good at putting those things aside).

It’s the little things, you know, that often surprise us. The lever. When one compares the size of a lever to the object one is attempting to move, to someone who has not seen or used one before, it just doesn’t seem possible. How can you move such a large object with just a lever and a fulcrum? Pulleys are pretty much the same. A small wheel and some rope can help an individual move something much larger than what they could without the help of a pulley. As I was working on my wood pile this weekend, I was reminded also that termites – little termites – can tear down a large structure. Lots of people are afraid of mice or spiders or other small critters that when we compare them to the size of the human they have just encountered, realistically they should not be able to stand a chance of surviving, should the human be able to put aside his or her fear and actually swat that critter.

I guess we could say that size does matter.

Size matters in our first lesson. Now, in order to get the bigger picture of what’s going on, we have to back up a couple of chapters to chapter 15 when the prophet Samuel has been called by the Lord God Almighty to go and anoint a new king of Israel because Saul, who is still on the throne, has ticked off God. God told Saul to do something; Saul thought he knew better; and just like any high school student who doesn’t do his or her assignments, he got in a whole lot of trouble. So much trouble, in fact, that God said, ‘Okay that’s it! Everybody, outta your gene pool. You’re descendants are not going to follow you to the throne!’ And the Lord God directs Samuel to go anoint David, son of Jesse, from Bethlehem, as the new king. Now in political terms, that’s called a coup. In political terms, it’s also called suicide.

David. Young David. The eighth son of Jesse – not the first, not the second, not the third, not any of the others – the eighth, the youngest, the smallest, teenager David, little David, has been anointed king. Saul has either not yet heard about it or He is ignoring the news or he doesn’t know what to do about it. But regardless of what’s going on in Saul’s mind, the Philistines meanwhile have camped out there on the border of Israel. Jesse’s three oldest sons (David’s three oldest brothers) have signed up to serve Saul, to serve, to protect and, as it turns out, to cower in the trenches, because the Philistines have a not-

so-secret weapon: Goliath. Goliath is a one-man army, which, depending upon the biblical translation you read, stands somewhere between seven and nine feet tall. Regardless of how big this guy is, he gets three verses allotted to his armaments alone; we're talking about a guy the size of André the Giant here.

But unlike André the Giant, Goliath starts off every morning by taunting the Israelis – ‘Yo, dog face: come over here and fight like a man! Oh wait, I forgot – you’re just a bunch of scared little girls, aren’t you? What kind of god have you got over there in Israel if you won’t even come and fight me?’ Now as you can imagine, those taunts did not sit well with Saul or his army, but no one took the brute up on his offer to go man-to-man, one on one. Saul even goes so far as to promise money, a daughter in marriage, and apparent freedom from all taxes to anyone who goes and faces this Philistine and defeats him, but no one takes him up on his offer.

David, meanwhile, being the good son and good brother, whose dad has directed him to take supplies to his brothers there on the front line, hears this daily rant. ‘Isn’t anyone going to respond to this blowhard?’ And the answer comes back a resounding “No!” Well, word gets back to King Saul that someone amongst his troops is making noises like he wants to stand up to this affront to Israel. And oh yes, this affront to the Lord God Almighty, as well. So Saul calls David into his tent where he questions David; he questions David’s integrity, he questions his intentions. Then he loads David down with his heavy, oversized, adult-sized armor . . . which David pretty much sheds as soon as it’s put on him because he is already armed. Young David is armed, as he informs the Philistine representative, “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, whom you have defied.” (1 Samuel 17:45) More to the point, David says, “This very day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.” (17:46)

So just in case anyone is a little unclear as to the concept of what’s about to happen, young David – little David, untested David, David who has been anointed as king, David who has faced down lions and bears – is going to stand face to face with his latest enemy with five smooth stones, his sling, and his faith. Not a whole lot, one might think, in the face of adversity.

In our Gospel reading, the disciples are in a boat. It’s late (or early, depending upon what you think of the hours between midnight and 4:00 a.m.). They’re tired; Jesus has been teaching all day long; the crowds have been so great there, gathered on the side of a hill, that they had to put Jesus in a boat and row him out from shore a little bit so that his voice could project to the vast crowd that is there. They’re now crossing the lake to get to the other side. Jesus is asleep in the back of the boat when out of nowhere, a storm comes up. The disciples are freaking out; they wake up Jesus – “Don’t you care that we’re about to die?” Jesus responds with his best parent voice, ‘Hey! Knock it off!’ (that’s a Brock paraphrase) and everything – the wind, the waves, and the disciples – calms down.

The little things: a quick couple of words from Jesus – peace, be still – and everything’s okay. Despite the overload of anxiety the disciples have experienced, that trust, that faith in God that Jesus strove to explain (as we heard in last week’s Gospel about the might of the seeds of faith) – you know those little seeds, you get them planted and they sprout up everywhere, that little bit of faith becomes overwhelming. But how often do we have even that little bit of faith?

This past week, Debbie Wilson, our Director of Contemporary Music, Judy Collins, our Spiritual Gifts coordinator, and I attended a conference for Large Congregations of the ELCA. We had opportunities to meet folks from around the country, talk about what their congregations are doing, what's working, what's not working, what somebody else is doing that might work here at Trinity; we got to talk a lot about big picture things, and we took a look at some of the little things that are going on. We had some very good speakers, including our Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson, and they were all good and engaging and though provoking. One of the speakers, though, brought out this little reminder about the things we are called to do, the things that seem like they aren't really all that difficult but help us on our journey of faith. The little things that maybe push us in a direction that might not be too comfortable to go, but those little things that cause me to say to myself, 'I understand what that Philistine is saying, and I sure don't like what he's saying, but I'm not all that certain what I can do about it; I'm not certain that I'm the one to stand up to that Philistine.'

We were reminded at the conference, as well, of that great statistic I have hear before, the one that says Christians in the Lutheran tradition, regardless of how friendly we might see ourselves, tend to invite someone to join us in church on average once every twenty-seven years.

Here's a little thing you could do! Try to get ahead of the average – invite someone to join you for worship. Invite someone you know (not someone to whom you're related or someone who's already a member here at Trinity), invite them to come next week to the Sundae Summer Concert series – it's going to be outside, there's going to be music, you don't even have to come inside to hear me preach. And there's free food! If you know a family with young children, invite them to join us – or you – at the Vacation Church School at the end of July. Or maybe this fall when our Festival of the Arts program starts up again – invite a co-worker to come to a concert. Or if you want to be really daring, invite someone to join you for worship. Just think how overflowing this space would be if everyone here today brought with them just one person! Those little things can make a difference.

Little things like water being poured over Wyatt's head just a few minutes ago. How can that little bit of water make any difference in Wyatt's life? That water can make a difference in Wyatt's life because we say that infused within that water the Spirit is alive. And as the water flowed over his head and he did that great little arm waving, the Spirit entered him and infused him and filled him up. God entered Wyatt's life through the water. God enters our life through the word. God enters Wyatt's life through his mom and dad, Leanne and Ryan, and their faith. That little bit of water is going to make a lifetime of difference in Wyatt's life.

Let me close with a story about a little thing, one of those little things that so often goes unnoticed. One of the speakers at the conference, Mark Mittelberg, shared a story about his own faith journey. He talked about the time when he worked for a newspaper and felt the Spirit really moving him to invite his friend, his boss, to join him and his family for the upcoming Easter worship. His boss, an avowed atheist, just put him down every time Mark brought up the subject. Mark writes:

“With all of my evangelistic overtures being instantly shut down, I was beginning to get a little embarrassed. Why was he so disinterested in talking about spiritual matters if God was indeed calling me to talk with him? Finally I stammered, ‘Well, if you’ve got any questions, you know where my desk is’ and I walked out.

“What was that all about? I couldn’t understand why he was so adamantly resistant. In the end, I concluded that maybe I was just going to be one link in a very long chain of people and experiences that would eventually lead him to Christ. Still, as far as I know, he remains a sceptic to this day.

“Fast forward several years. By this time I was a teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church in suburban Chicago. After I spoke one Sunday morning, a middle aged man came up, shook my hand, and said, ‘I just want to thank you for the spiritual influence you’ve had in my life.’ ‘That’s very nice,’ I said, ‘but who are you?’ ‘Let me tell you my story,’ he replied. ‘A few years ago I lost my job. I didn’t have any money. I was afraid I was going to lose my house. I called a friend of mine who runs a newspaper and said ‘Do you have any work for me?’ He asked, ‘Can you tile floors?’ Well, I had tiled my bathroom once, so I said, ‘Sure’. He told me he needed some tiling work done at the newspaper, ‘If you can do that, I’ll pay you.’

“So one day, not long before Easter, I was on my hands and knees behind a desk in a business office of the newspaper, fixing some tiles when you walked into the room. I don’t think you even saw me. You started talking about God and Jesus and Easter and the church to some guy, and he wasn’t interested at all. But I was crouching there, listening, my heart was beating fast, and I started thinking, ‘I need God. I need to go to church.’ As soon as you left, I called my wife and said, ‘We’re going to church this Easter.’ She said, ‘You’re kidding.’ I said, ‘No. We are.’ We ended up coming to this church that Easter. And my wife, my son, and I all came to faith in Christ. I wanted to thank you.” (Mark Mittelberg & Lee Strobel, *The Unexpected Adventure*)

The little things. The little things add up. The ounces that can weigh us down or help us go light. The stone that can bring down an opponent. The small word that can stop a storm. The water that will change a life. The simple act or gesture or invitation that can be life altering. Let’s go forward today and do some little things.

Amen