

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
“Growing Our Faith: Dream Small”  
Rev. Bethany Peerbolte  
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1 Samuel 17:32-40; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

I spent this last Sunday in Washington D.C. I had never been before, because the school I attended started the annual 8<sup>th</sup> grade trip when I was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. I have never liked history, but I do like musicals, so I confess I went to see the stuff that related to Hamilton. People talk about New York or LA as a place for dreamers, but I found Washington DC is a place for dreamers too. The dreams that had to be dreamed to make that place a reality are huge. The statues and memorials and Arlington and buildings all are there because of big dreams. I learned all sorts of fun things, most I will not admit I didn't know before going. One thing I will admit learning, is that 8 of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were younger than I am now. When my friends and I learned this we joked about what we were doing with our lives. It became a common theme to hear about amazing people who had achieved big dreams by the time they were 30. The joke wore thin and as I was sitting in the Supreme Court Hall it hit me, I was surrounded by statues of modern people. Chief Justice Roberts will have a bust made of him for the hall when he dies. What am I doing with my life? I can pretty confidently say there will never be a statue of me in the Capital.

Then I came home and read these words from Corinthians and I had a small panic attack. I know these verses are supposed to be comforting. They affirm that we are all given gifts from God and are especially skilled for our work in the world. It should build me up that I work with such an amazing group of Christians, all making up one body. But despite how scholars tell me how I should feel about these verses, I still only feel anxiety and worry. When I read these verses I think these gifts are amazing! Prophecy, speaking in different languages, miracles...people with these gifts have statues made of them...these gifts can change the world. Then I look at what I consider my gifts and the anxiety sets in. My inner monologue usually goes something like this “Yes I have gifts, I believe God gave them to me, but are they as cool as the gifts listed here. Will my gifts move the world toward the kingdom of God like a literal miracle healer would?” Then I think “okay maybe my gifts are just as big and just as important. The Bible says so so let's go with that...but am I even using my gifts correctly. I never got a manual on my gifts. How do I know that I'm not shirking my gifts on worthless endeavors? And if the whole body is depending on me to do my part will the whole kingdom of God come crashing down if I don't use my gifts exactly right, which I don't know what is right, do I even know my gifts...” you can see how my anxious mind spins and spins over these simple “encouraging” verses. Fear took hold of me and I was paralyzed thinking about what God wants me to do with the gifts I have been given.

The Israelite army was also paralyzed with fear by Goliath's challenge. By the time the Israelites faced Goliath they had become a great army. They knew how to wage war together as a unit but the Philistines played by different rules. They sent their champion out to challenge one opponent from the Israelite army. One hand to hand combat match to decide the whole war. This was not something the Israelites were comfortable with and so they retreated to their tents in fear to try and come up with a plan.

David arrives on the frontline bringing gifts to his brothers. He isn't old enough to fight yet and so he spends his days watching sheep, a job his brothers were more than happy to leave behind. After David delivers his gifts, he hears Goliath's taunts and is shocked. Not a single Israelite steps forward. As David goes around camp he hears that the King has offered his daughter to the winner, the winner's family never has to pay taxes again. David can tell the King is getting desperate for someone to step up. David's shock isn't that no one has taken the King's offers, David is shocked that not even one of God's army is willing to fight. David looks around him at gifted men who are all paralyzed with fear.

David doesn't care about the King's offer, he is offended by Goliath's lack of respect for God. When the King calls him to his tent David pleads his case to be the champion. David's willingness to move is not because he isn't

afraid, he is willing to fight because he trusts his gifts and he trusts God. David has faced down a terrifying opponent before, bears, lions. He recounts these battles to the King as proof he can defeat Goliath. But it isn't his arms, or aim, or sling that gives David confidence, it is God, who has rescued him before.

This part of the story is my favorite (Read 1 Samuel 17: 38-40) This is the part of the story that reminds me this isn't a story about a small person stepping into unknown territory to take down a giant. David is small, but he is also uniquely gifted. He isn't being asked to do something out of the ordinary, he is doing something he has done at least twice before. David turns down the big weapons that he is unfamiliar with, and even though it leaves him more exposed he knows he must do this his way. For David it all seems so simple because he has found a way only he can help. His gifts in this place and time are what is needed.

David and Goliath has become synonymous with the underdog win, of something small overcoming something huge. But I don't think that is all this story has to offer. Yes it says to dream big and face the giants, but is also says dream small. After rejecting the sword and armor, David went to the river and found 5 smooth stones to place in his bag. 5...he didn't load up his bag, he didn't stress over their size, he knew what he was comfortable with and used what was around him. Using our gifts is not about finding grand gestures or making elaborate plans, we aren't even really called to solve any particular problem. When the spirit gives us a gift we are asked to pick up the simple stones.

These stone might say to us "leave work 30 minutes early and spend time with your family," another might say "call up an old friend." There might be a stone laying around that says "invite the family whose loved one is deployed to dinner," or "learn something new about a good friend." These are the simple stones the simple moments that can truly shift the world.

As I sat in my fear this week I did what I always do when I'm immovable, I went on Facebook.

As I scrolled through my friend's newsfeeds I came across a post that was out of character for a friend of mine. This friend, Kevin, is a late-night radio host in a college town. His job essentially is to play the hits and create a party atmosphere every night of the week. Kevin has always been a high energy person, so it is no surprise he excels at this. He is always pictured at fun events, doing crazy things for his fans, his picture on buses, but this post was not a fun picture. This post was a screen shot of a message Kevin had recently received from a long-time listener. This listener, he said, often called in to request songs and he has met them at events over the past year. The message was about the first time this listener called the radio station. When they called to request a song one night, they had plans to end their life. They were holding on to the last happy things they could think of and decided to call in a request a favorite song. Kevin did what he always does, answered, listened, and played their song. For him it was a normal interaction, but the way the listener recounts it in the message he told them to "keep your head up buddy" those five words shifted their whole world. Five simple words that seemed like nothing to Kevin, all in a days work, but God used them to bring down the giant in that listeners life.

The hope in Corinthians is that we all have gifts that can shift the world, not by making giants fall with big dreams, but by us picking up the stones around us. We don't have to go out and find a huge problem to solve, we don't have to put on someone else's mannerisms, we need to find the simple moments where we can be helpful. We may even find that by doing what feels comfortable to us, making a meal, sending cards, looking into someone's eyes and smiling might be the exact stone needed to bring down the giant.

If you have big dreams, great! Big dreams are the foundation of our country, but don't miss the stones along the way. Don't pass the simple moments that change the world. Dream small, AMEN