**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**16th July 2023**

**Gathering**

Fe, Fi, Fo, Fum

The giants that lurk in our subconscious

Raising their heads every so often

When we dream of freedom

When we choose a different path

Fe, Fi, Fo, Fum

The reminder that we aren’t quite free

Locked into the giants of tradition and culture and politics

But there is a story

Of giants and shepherds

That the powerful fear

And the underdog clings to for life

But who are WE

Who are WE

Between the preposterous giant

And the cunning sling thrower

Let us bring that truth

Into worship

Hello… I’m Roddy Hamilton… minister of New Kilpatrick Parish… and thank you again that you’ve invited us to be with you… It is a genuine gift to us… that we can share worship… so let us do so… somewhere between the Philistine giant called Goliath and the Israelite pretender… Of course… we are no longer naive about this story… It no longer makes sense to hear it with the ears of children… This is a real-world story… and this is the story of that story… and how we have used it and abused it in the name of God… In that difficult place… we wrestle with ourselves and with God… This is worship…

**The Story: 1 Samuel 17 abridged**

Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle. Saul and the Israelites gathered in the valley of Elah. The Philistines stood on the mountain on one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side. And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armoured with a coat of mail; the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver’s beam, and his spear’s head weighed six hundred shekels of iron; and his shield-bearer went before him. He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, ‘Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.’ When Saul and all Israel heard these words, they were greatly afraid.

Now David was the son of Jesse. The three eldest sons had followed Saul to the battle. David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father’s sheep at Bethlehem. For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening.

Jesse said to his son David, ‘Take for your brothers this parched grain and these ten loaves to your brothers. See how your brothers fare.’

David came to the encampment as the army was going forth to the battle line and went and greeted his brothers. As he talked with them, Goliath, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines, and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him.

All the Israelites, when they saw the man, fled from him and were very much afraid. David said, ‘What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel?

When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul; and he sent for him. David said to Saul, ‘Let no one’s heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.’ Saul said to David, ‘You are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth.’ But David said to Saul, ‘Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, and killed it.’ David said, ‘The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.’

So Saul clothed David with his armour; and he tried in vain to walk. 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; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him.When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth. The Philistine said to David, ‘Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?’ And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. But 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, whom you have defied. This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; for the battle is the Lord’s and he will give you into our hand.’

When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. The troops of Israel and Judah rose up with a shout and pursued the Philistines. The Israelites came back from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their camp.

**Prayer**

We pause

We ponder

We pray

And worry about the stories we tell

And how we tell them

And the reaction we have

Always the winning side

A half story about God and underdogs

And the reality of the violence of such a tale

Half true?

Part myth?

A legend?
A moral tale?

We pause

We ponder

We pray

O God

And we try to make sense of faith

And the injustice of it

How we picture it

And what the world must think

And those who are on the losing side

May we find a maturing faith

May we hold such stories honestly

May we live the questions they provoke

And the challenge they uncover

And the truth they point to

And the invitation to place ourselves in them

Somewhere

And not always where we expect

Loving God

In such stories of faith

These living, becoming stories

May we hear them again

Anew

For the first time again

And make space for a deeper relationship

A bigger encounter

A wider experience in you

We pause

We ponder

We pray

And we are heard

Lord’s Prayer

**The Story again**

This is the most popular story we have… the giant… faces the boy shepherd… with a sling shot… and by the hand of the Lord… the impossible happens… the giant falls after David’s personal best sling shot… and proves himself king material… And the Israelite win… is just one of many under David… Classic story of the underdog coming out on top… except that probably isn’t what happened…

There is no problem holding onto the David defeats Goliath metaphor… That is in the story we were brought up to believe that story… a little trust in God and you can slay giants…

But… this is the Bible… and the story is more complex than that…

The Philistines marched their way into Judah along one of the valleys that stretch across Israel… and lined up on one side of the valley…

The Israelites lined up on the other side… and there they stood facing each other… and had done so for days… weeks… To go down into the valley to fight they would be easy picking from the other side… so there they stood… shouting… bored… hungry… Stalemate…

So to get things going… rules of engagement suggested… a warrior from one side against one from the other… the best of your heavy infantry from either side…

The Philistines were keen on this because they had Goliath… who was led out onto the valley floor each day… taunting the Israelites… The Israelites however… had no one to match Goliath… until David the shepherd came along…

Saul the king delighted with a volunteer… offered his own armour… You’d need it.. .two infantry against each other… But the armour was too heavy and big for David…

David simply picked up five round pebbles for his sling shot… and that was him

This wasn’t a catapult… like Oor Wullie has in his back pocket… This was a sling… And slingers were a whole division of the army… equivalent to archers… but with slings… A sling was a pouch with two strings… swirled round and round… 5 or 6 times a second… and one cord was released… and the deadly projectile flew…

The valley of Elah… where all this took place… was heavy with barium sulphate… double the density of ordinary rock… Can you can imagine the speed a pebble flies out a sling… And slingers… from tapestries of the time… were able to accurately hit flying birds… such was their aim…

Given David had been using a sling all his days fending off wild animals from his flock… he would probably be quite accurate…

So when David faces Goliath… Goliath is in danger… he might have laughed… but it was his last time…

But that’s not all… Goliath himself… is led out onto the valley floor… Why?… well because his armour was so great… and heavy… you didn’t have a lot of speed… or manoeuvrability… He was a sitting duck…

And it is also possible to conjecture he had a form of giantism… which often affects your sight… so he probably couldn’t see well either… In truth… he didn’t have much of a chance… You almost feel sorry for Goliath…

But it is a story about how we tell our stories… but the way we tell our stories… we make ourselves an underdog… in order to make us seem better… or that God was clearly on our side… or define ourselves as some kind of hero…

In itself that’s fine… it does happen… but it is when we use stories to create some myth around ourselves… we have to realise we’ve got it wrong… Yet we do it all the time… Boris Johnston does that well… Donald Trump even better… and Vladimir Putin… a classic…

We are being disingenuous… placing ourselves in the story as David… Look at us… we’re the underdog… against the EU… against NATO… against the democrats… God is on our side…

Well the news just in is… God is not on any side… other than love… truth… justice…

But when we offer ourselves a more accurate reimagining of David and Goliath… no longer a naive children’s story… we might see the danger of ourselves becoming Goliath… and become much more aware of how we spin our stories to suit our version of ourselves… rather than use them to speak God’s truth into power…

**News**

**Prayer**

When we become the giants

O God

We pray for ourselves

And how easily it can happen

When we become the powerful ones

And kid ourselves we are the weak

O God

We pray for ourselves

When we become the rule makers

Over trade and environment

O God

We pray for ourselves

When we judge ourselves on our wealth

And decide what the poor need

O God

We pray for ourselves

When we control our politics to suit ourselves

Regardless of what it does to others

O God

We pray for ourselves

And we pause

And we ponder

And we pray

And find our place among the least

And the limiting of opportunity

And the demands for our labour

And the censoring of our dreams

And the hunger in our bellies

And the silencing of our stories

And we pray for the powerful

The ones who control the story

And misjudge your intent

And who you are among us

And we pause

And we ponder

And we pray

And dare us to hear ourselves

And you to hear our confession

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**