

(the version on the web cast was cut down in the interests of time)

Begijnhof, Amsterdam 2nd August 2020
1 Samuel 17: 17-24 & 28-30

MOST ABOUT DAVID

Who is person in the Bible about whose life we know most ????

It's not Abraham.	We don't hear of him until he is over 90
It's not Moses.	There are many missing years
It's not Paul	He is middle aged and respected when he first appears
It's not even Jesus	We know little about his first 30 years, and the Gospels are not biographies.

The person whose life we know most about is David. Most of the books of 1st and 2nd Samuel are about David.

He appears when he is a boy probably ten or eleven who looks after sheep and has good musical ability

And then we see learn of him as a war hero

We learn about the animosity and jealousy which King Saul has for him and the deep love which Saul's son Jonathan has for him.

We discover that he wasn't exactly monogamous – He had several wives.

We see his success as an army commander and as king

We see also the mistakes he made, the And sins he committed.

We discover that he is not exactly a model father....

when his daughter is raped by her step brother, he says nothing.

We learn of attempts on his life.. by Saul and by his own son Absalom.

We learn of how he was passes the crown to possibly his youngest son Solomon.

But all of that ... all of that long life with its domestic and political battles seems to get eclipsed, hidden, behind one story, that of David and Goliath.

FOUR SUNDAY STORIES

In these four Sundays I am with you, I am taking a story which we probably all remember from childhood. I selected them after asking different people,

'What stories in the Bible do you remember from when you were young.'

Most people – men and women – mentioned Noah and the Flood, which we thought about last week. And everyone mentioned David and Goliath.

Anyone who lives in Amsterdam, indeed most people who visit Amsterdam will be familiar with that story because only 200 metres from the church are the

statues of the huge Oude Goliath – Goliath and the younger, fresh-skinned David.

DAVID & GOLIATH METAPHOR

The story – like other stories – has become so implanted in the minds of people irrespective of whether they have anything to do with the Christian or Jewish faiths, so much so that in an occasion when two very unequal forces confront each other, people say it's a David and Goliath event.

It could be a group of schoolboys playing football against Ajax or it could be a small nation like Fiji challenging the power of China

I'm going to come to the story...which we all know later.

But first let's consider the bits that we are not familiar with:

Long before the fight that he wins, we know some important things about David

A) HE KNEW GOD WANTED HIM

Samuel, the great prophet had anointed Saul as King because the people wanted a king. And the choice was not the best. He did not have the respect of his troops, he was not a military strategist, and he had poor mental health.

God was not keen on kings, but if there was to be one, he wanted someone better than Saul. And so David, still a boy in a secret ceremony was anointed with holy oil, and we read that 'The Spirit of the Lord was upon him from that day onwards' (1Sam 16:13)

B) HIS ABILITIES WERE WELL APPRECIATED

When Samuel anoints him, he has just returned from minding his father's sheep, and later he will indicate that the job required him to save the sheep from attacks of wild animals. This is not a soft boy, tied to his mother's apron strings, afraid of the challenges of the world outside the home.

David is brave, but he also was gifted. He played the lyre – a form of guitar....something which brings us to a third detail about him.

C) HE KNEW THE KING.

David was not a stranger to the royal family. The king got to know about him because of his own mental illness. He may have been bi-polar as well as prone to

depression. The Bible tells us that Saul's servants suggested that to help him deal with his violent moods, it might be helpful to get someone to play for him. And so they recruit David with his guitar to soothe the troubled mind of the king.

The boy who faces Goliath is not some waif, social reject, or upstart. He comes into the story which we all know as a teenager who

- a) knows that God wants him
- b) knows that his abilities are appreciated

I want to stop there and ask you as I ask myself:

When we were teenagers,

- a) were we made aware that God wanted us?
- b) did we know that our potentials were appreciated?

And just as importantly, when we consider the young people, the children the teenager who surround us, are they aware that they are wanted by God? Are they aware that their potentials, their abilities are appreciated?

JESUS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

It's interesting to see how in the Gospels Jesus always affirms the value of children and young people.

His disciples want to keep children back from them..and he says, 'Let them come. They show what heaven is made of. I am their saviour as much as yours.'

He sees an epileptic boy whose father is at his wit's end because no one can help his boy.

He is brought to see a girl whose life is seriously in danger. Outside the house people are saying, 'it's no use. Nothing can be done for her, she's as good as dead.' And he turns on those who have written her off, and then he enters the house and brings the girl back to life.

We don't have to understand everything about young people.

We don't have to agree with what they think.

But we do, as people of faith, to value them and the potential which God as placed within them.

BACK TO DAVID

So back to David... who has gone from his father's house to take food to his brothers who are fighting. He discovers from talking to soldiers that the king has offered his daughter in marriage to the man who will kill Goliath.

David's older brother calls him an impudent rascal for asking an awkward question..... very typical of what happens to adolescents.

But now we're going to hear what happens next when David meets King Saul.

2nd Reading 1 Samuel 17 31-40

WE KNOW THE END

This is as far as we are going with the reading. We all know the end of the story...of how David goes out with a sling and five stones . If you have seen pictures of young men in Palestine facing up to the Israel army, you'll see they use the same kind of weapon.

We know that the giant laughs at him, mocks him, but that in the end it is David's skill with a sling which terminates Goliath's life.

We know that part of the story.

SAUL AND DAVID

But what for me is the most important part lies before that. It has to do with what happens between Saul and David.

It must be forty years ago that my friends and I played the story of David and Goliath in a church with many young people in the congregation. We had children on one side being the Philistines and on the other the Israelites. We had a boy sitting on man's shoulders cover with sackcloth as the Goliath. There was noise, shouting boos and cheers, depending who appeared.

But the most dramatic moment... was when David, played by a teenager stood while Saul took off his armour:

his tunic

his helmet

his heavy armoured coat...

put them all on David and then gave him his own sword.

David staggered around as if he was drunk. This stuff... this armour, these weapons were too heavy for him. So he took them off.

What we realised that day was that not only were the weapons too heavy for them. But that the weapons weren't working.

All the Israelite soldiers had tunics and helmets and coats and swords, but they were failing them. None of them had succeeded against the enemy.

But the adults – especially the king – expected a young person to succeed with the methods which had proven themselves to be useless against the threat of the enemy.

I'll say that again...

The adults – especially the king – expected a young person to succeed with the methods which had proven themselves to be useless against the threat of the enemy.

OTHERS LIKE DAVUD – MALALA & GRETA

David was not the last teenager to recognise that what adults were doing was not leading to victory.

The Pakistani girl Malala Yousafzai realised that the way the Taliban refused education to girls, was not helping women to hold develop their full potential in the Muslim world, so she defied the Taliban and ended up with a bullet in her head, but stood firm and is helping to change hundreds of years of male domination.

Greta Thunberg, the Swedish schoolgirl environmentalist has been the victim of hate mail and lies because she dares to say that the way adults are failing to deal with global pollution and the destruction of the environment is not working. When she was asked to speak to the US Congress, she did not come with a prepared speech. She told those who heard here that they shouldn't listen to her, but listen to the science and then read the Paris Declaration on Climate Change which the US had agreed to, but was doing little to implement.

These two girls have done more to stir the conscience of the world with regard to women's rights and the rights of the environment than many of the most influential men and women in the world.

I pray to God that when this Covid 19 crisis is over, we will not go back to expecting the younger generations to succeed with the adult strategies which are clearly failing
...whether that has to do with our failure to take seriously the
impact our lifestyles has on ruining the environment

..or whether it has to do with how wealthy nations like the one I belong to regarding itself as being above reproach and singling out for censure other

nations for their injustices....while all the time we export arms to Saudi Arabia knowing that they may well be used to kill civilians in Yemen.

In the western world we seem to encourage a desire for incessant financial growth and increase in consumption...though these always widen the poverty gap rather than close it. Mammon is an ugly god . It does nothing but take whereas the God whom you and I worship always gives.

Just the other day I was appalled to realise – because of a governmental healing in the USA – how much of the world today is under the unaccountable influence of mega corporations – Amazon, Microsoft, Apple and Facebook. They are headed by men whose income is more than the combined GDP of a handful of African nations. Their empires dictate public taste, influence culture and politics and threaten the livelihood of small business owners in the two thirds world. But they account to no-one, apart from share-holders keen on profit.

Do we seriously as adults want our children and grandchildren to succeed with strategies which we can clearly see have not rid the world of the hostile forces of hunger, poverty, prejudice and war?

LOAVES AND FISHES

David is not the only teenager to expose the failure of adults and point to another way.

For in the Gospels, we read the story of how one afternoon Jesus, confronted with a crowd of listeners, thought it was time to have something to eat. But where was the food to come from. No adult was willing to give, all were waiting to take... until a boy the same age as David, thought that sharing might be a good idea, so he gave what he had to Jesus... and the crowd began to eat.

NOVO CENTO

The first year I worked in this church was 1976. At that time there was an Italian film by Bernardo Bertolucci called Novocento -1900 showing in the Tuschinski. It was around seven hours long. It came in three episodes, each over two hours long. I watched the whole film twice, even though I could neither understand Italian or read the Dutch subtitles.

Eventually there was a shortened version with English subtitles. I didn't enjoy it as much apart from one scene right at the end, when a girl is standing on a haystack, looking into the distance and showing incredible excitement which mystifies the older women who are all around her.

It is then that an old woman says the words, ' Blessed are the young who see what is not there.'.. or to put it another way, ' Blessed are the young who see what adult eyes avoid.'