

Are We Ready to Slay the Monster, the Beast, The Giant: Goliath, Racism?

A version of this sermon manuscript was preached by the Rev. Erin Counihan at Oak Hill Presbyterian Church on Sunday, June 21, 2015.

Text: 1 Samuel 17: 1a, 4-11, 19-23, 32-49

This Wednesday, we sat in that room.

Right over there. On the other side of the wall. Sitting, in a circle. Was it nine of us? Or eight? I can't quite remember.

But there we were. On Wednesday.

And I like to think, because I've come to know the people who gather in that room each Wednesday, that had a stranger come in, through our unlocked door and joined our Wednesday bible study, that stranger, too, would have been welcomed. Someone would have motioned to an open seat. Someone else would have slid their book over to share the lesson. Someone else might have gotten up to offer the newcomer a bible, so that when we went around the circle reading the passage, our new guest would have had the opportunity to read in turn. We would have invited them to share- their opinions, questions, ideas, doubts, and prayer requests. Then we would have bowed our heads and closed our eyes and prayed to God with our new friend.

As the news of the terrible tragedy, the act of terror, the violent hate crime flooded our worlds Wednesday night, I couldn't get that scene out of my mind. Hadn't I just sat in such a room, with such faithful people, that very day? I fell apart weeping over the idea.

Because, at first, when I first heard the news, that there had been a shooting in a church at a prayer meeting, that was as far as I got. And in my disbelief, I dig deeper. I searched for more information, for details. How could this be? What kind of monster could do such a thing. And then when I read the rest of the story- that the shooting was at an AME Church, at THE AME Church, at Mother Emanuel, in the deep south, a church and denomination created because the white church wouldn't let them in. A church that had been burned to the ground out of hate. That the victims were all African-American, and the shooter was white. My heart shattered into a million pieces. Because now I could imagine what kind of monster had done such a thing. Because I knew that monster. I knew that monster's name- Racism.

That monster has been destroying lives, churches, communities, and unity in our nation for centuries. That monster we here in St. Louis know well. We know it well in the stories of our schooling, in the stories of the changes in this neighborhood, and especially over the past 10 months we know it well in conversations about policing and the deaths of Michael Brown, Kajieme Powell, Vonderitt Meyers, and Ledarius Williams.

Here in our congregation, we have been attempting to talk about that monster. We've held sacred conversations, attended marches and learning events, we've offered *so many* prayers. We've been learning new terms, reading new scholars, and hearing new stories. We've been listening to new voices. And it hasn't been easy or comfortable. There are days when even I, the one who talks about this all the time, have thought, man, we've got to talk about something else. It's getting pretty awkward. This is exhausting. We need a break.

But then I read the news, or talk to a friend, or watch how people watch my own kid when we walk into a store and I am reminded that my black and brown sisters and brothers don't have that luxury of taking a break from the conversation, of hiding from the monster, not even for a break, not ever for a day. So as long as our black and brown brothers and sisters are dying at the hands of the monster of racism, the beast of injustice, and the devil that is gun violence, in our streets, in their own homes, and in God's home- I have no business being comfortable. The *least* I can do is talk about it. Pray about it. Learn about it. Listen to their voices, their experiences, and their cries. And hear God's call to be humbled, to repent, and to work for justice.

Because that monster of racism, I believe is our Goliath. It is this big, bad thing, supported by an army of hate, wearing the armor of indifference, imposing its way on our systems, laws, communities, schools and society. And I believe today, with our broken hearts, we are presented with a choice. We can be the Israelite army, the chosen people of God, armed with the tools of righteousness and love, but stunned, and scared, frozen in awkward fear, refusing to take action. Or we can be David.

David. Who in this moment, is not the great warrior king, but is just young shepherd. No one thinks he's anything special. But he is called by God. Experienced in the love of God. Confident in the hope of God. Rejecting any armor but that of the Word of our Lord.

We can be David, and show up, stare the monster Goliath of Racism in the face, take every bit of trash talk, of garbage hyperbole, it can spew at us, and boldly say, out loud, “I come to you in the name of the Lord God, whom you have defied.”

We can be David.

What might happen? If our God, the God who uses all kinds of broken, unexpected people, used us?

Our God, the God who called a really old couple to birth a chosen tribe.

Our God, the God who called a stutterer to speak the law to the people.

Our God, the God who called children to be prophets.

Our God, the God who called an unwed teenage girl to give birth to the divine being.

Our God, the God who called an oppressor, a persecutor, to preach and grow the church.

Our God, the God who called a boy shepherd to take on the biggest beast of his time.

What if that God is calling to us now? Can you imagine? For a moment, if we didn't care how big the monster, beast Goliath of Racism was, if we didn't worry about how wide and deep and far its arms reach, but if we could be like David, look it in the eye and call it out. Saying **THAT IS NOT THE WAY OF GOD!**

What if we channeled David every time we hear a just slightly offensive joke?

What if we channeled David every time we noticed discrimination, inequality and underrepresentation in our workplaces, in our schools, on panels and governing

boards?

What if we channeled David every time we cringed at a friend's social media post?

What if we channeled David every time we caught ourselves exercising our own privilege?

We can channel David. We can be David. We can do something. We must do something. Something. Because, we don't have to be armed with the right words. We have God's true word.

We can be like David, are little things, called by God into service. *To slay the beast*. Not with big maneuvers, impressive moves or fancy tools, but with our faith in God and God's message of love.

Goliath is out there. And in here [points to sanctuary]. And in here [points to my own heart].

Are we ready to be called to service like young David, infused with our faith in the Lord? Or will we sit by silently and watch the beast attack, stuck in our fear?ⁱ

I will close today with the reading of our Gospel from the book of Mark. Hear now the word of our Lord:

³⁵*On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."* ³⁶*And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him.* ³⁷*A great windstorm arose, and the*

waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”³⁹ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.⁴⁰ He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”ⁱⁱ

ⁱ This sermon references the exegetical ponderings of Rev. Tawnya Denise Anderson as shared with the RevGalBlogPals. I am thankful for her vision and her challenge.

ⁱⁱ Mark 4:35-40 NRSV