

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, May 17, 2009
Rev. John Tapscott

"VICTORIOUS LIVING"

1 Samuel 17:47

Many of us have known and loved the story of David and Goliath since childhood. And of course, David and Goliath type stories are woven throughout our culture. We love it when the underdog overcomes the heavy favourite. Israel loved the story too, since they often were a smaller and weaker nation surrounded by stronger and hostile nations. In fact, at the time of this story the Philistines were stronger than Israel, militarily, culturally, economically. Of course, sometimes David and Goliath exchange roles. The school yard weakling may later the bully. And at times Israel was no longer small and weak but strong and powerful and seemed liked a threatening giant to its neighbours. So roles can and do change.

But today I fear that many Christians and sometimes the church live with a sense of discouragement and defeat. We feel small and insignificant. But the Bible shows us that we can live with a victorious spirit, a spirit of hope, an overcoming spirit. The New Testament is alive with this sense of victory, not military victory, but inner victory, a victory of the spirit. The early Christians never waged war on anyone; they were peaceful and loving people, who often suffered because of their faith. And yet they had a victorious spirit. They knew that they were "more than conquerors through him who loved us." They knew that "whatever is born of God conquers the world." God wants all his people, all of us to live with this victorious spirit. Now there are some words of David which can help us gain or regain this spirit. They are easy to remember and to hold in our hearts. David said to Goliath, "For the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand." (1 Samuel 17:47)

First, let's underline the fact that life does contain battles.

Victorious living doesn't mean having a battle-free life; it has to do with how we face our battles. When I was a teenager, I was given a book by Punch Imlach, the coach of the Maple Leafs back in the 1960's, when the team was worth talking about. It was about his career in hockey and was entitled, "Hockey is a Battle." Now I'm not saying that "life is a battle," at least not a constant battle, for we couldn't take that. But life does contain battles. And we all face them. Some of them are very large. When David faced Goliath, he was battling

a giant. Put Zedano Charo, the Boston Bruins defenseman, and actor Arthur Schweitenegger together, add 2 feet, and you've got Goliath. Archaeological evidence shows that some Philistines did grow to unusual heights. And even though King Saul had offered great rewards, no Hebrew soldier would go into battle against this giant.

In any case, life contains battles. Sometimes the battles we face are small ones, other times they are large indeed. They can range from struggling to pass Math or French class, to sorrows and disappointments, financial struggles, job loss, family problems, or temptations which threaten our careers and our relationships. Often we battle ourselves, our own desires, our own weaknesses. Sometimes we even wrestle with God and his plan for our lives, as Jacob did one long and memorable night. Sometimes we have to battle against our own inertia or indifference. Sometimes we battle serious illnesses for a time or even for a lifetime. And we will all battle some illness which will lead to death. How often we read in an obituary, "He or she fought a courageous battle against such and such a disease."

The church of Jesus Christ has battles. Sometimes they are internal struggles against heresy and division. Sometimes they are external battles against secularism and materialism and the world's outright hostility. It sometimes seems like the lion versus the lamb. Jesus himself went up against the giants of religious and political power which would not stop in their quest to get rid of him.

Look, being human means that we will have some battles on our hands. Some will be small; some will be great. And against these battles, we may feel small and weak. They can drain of us of the victorious, overcoming spirit.

But David give us keys to regaining the victorious spirit. David said, "The battle is the Lord's..."

This is one of those keys. David knew that the battle he faced was not just his, but God's, as well. David had some spiritual insights which helped him to know this. Goliath had said to the soldiers of Israel, "Are you not servants of Saul?" And the soldiers cowered in fear. They had forgotten that they were servants of the living God. But David did not forget. David moved forward into battle in the name of the Lord of hosts - something no one else there thought to do. Furthermore, David knew that Goliath had set himself up for a fall because he had cursed the armies of the living God, which was just like cursing God himself. David said, "The battle is the Lord's." That gave David confidence as he rejected Saul's armour and took up the weapon he knew would be most effective - a slingshot and five smooth stones.

One key to victorious living is knowing that the battles we face are not just ours, but the Lord's, too. The Bible teaches that God puts himself on the side of all who trust in him and put their faith in Jesus his Son. As Paul tells us in Romans, "If God is for us, who is against us?" Now of course, the Lord is with his people in a general sense, but how strengthening and encouraging it is when we call upon the Lord in every battle, when say to him, "Lord, I know that this battle is not just mine, but yours, too."

A little boy told his father that he was being picked on by three bullies at school. They had punched him and knocked him off his bike. They threatened to harm him the next day unless he paid protection money. The boy was troubled; he didn't know what to do. That evening his father taught him some basic techniques about defending himself, including the possibility that he might win them over as friends. The next morning father and son prayed together. And with a reassuring hug the father smiled confidently and said, "You can do it, son. I know you'll make out OK." So the boy got on his bike and rode off to school. But then the father got in his car. He followed at a distance but close enough to come to his son's assistance if needed. The son's battle was the father's battle, too.

Whatever battles we face, as individuals, whatever battles the church faces, we face them in the name of the Lord of hosts, knowing that our battle is his battle too. And that helps us to live with a victorious spirit. The only thing we must be sure of is that we are not fighting against the Lord unintentionally. For the Lord is not only on the side of his people, he is against those who defy and disobey him. The Lord is on our side; let's be sure we are on his.

Here's the other key which leads to victorious living. "The battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand." Take notice of these words, "he will give you into our hand."

You see, David knew that the battle was the Lord's and the victory would be God's too. Not David's, but God's. God would win the victory and then give it to the Israelites. David had confidence in the Lord because he knew that "the Lord who saved me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will save me from the hand of this Philistine."

Now David had to do his part and he did it with courage and skill. With slingshot and stones, he found the giant's weak spot, and Goliath fell to the ground. The whole Philistine army fled. God gave the victory to Israel, so that all the world would know that there was a God in Israel, a God who could not be defied again and again without consequence. What gives us a victorious spirit is knowing that we don't have win the victory on our own. The battle is the Lord's

and so too is the victory which he gives us in his own time and his own way.

Now we have a part to play, just as David had. A basketball player by the name of Stacey King played with the Chicago Bulls. Commenting on a particular game he said, "I'll always remember the night that Michael Jordan and I combined to score 70 points." Now the funny thing about that was that in that game Jordan scored 69 points and Stacey King scored 1. Of course, we have a part to play. Our part is 1 and God's is 69. Ultimately, God gains the victory and gives it to us. "The battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand."

In fact, on our behalf God has already taken on or twin giants of sin and death. We were helpless but God defeated these enemies for us through Christ's atoning death and resurrection victory. And now God gives the victory to us who believe in his Son. So we are already victors in the midst of strife, conquerors through him who loved us. Not even the power of sin and evil and death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are children of God, redeemed, forgiven, citizens of the heavenly realm, even before we get there. That's why Paul says, "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

And if God has given us victory over these giants, certainly no other giant will defeat us. Even now God is going into the battle with us, and showing us how to overcome the giants, or find a way around them or bring them down to size. Every battle we fight is God's, and in his own time, his victory will be fully revealed, and all the giants will be put away at least.

A couple of weeks ago, I told you how back in the 60's and 70's the churches in the Soviet Union were nearly dead. No sermons were being preached. The only people attending church were a few elderly folk. The demise of the church seemed inevitable as it battled the giants of communism and secularism and official atheism. But then the Iron Curtain fell and new religious freedoms arose. The Russian churches came alive again with many young people now praising God and hearing Biblical sermons. Outside one church a large sign still proclaims, "The Lamb wins."

You may feel small and be few in number, but those who are on the Lamb's side know this truth. "The Lamb wins." So we live not with a defeated, hopeless spirit, a spirit which says that it's all up to us. God has already overcome the biggest giants humans face. And one day all the giants we battle will topple to the ground. In fact, as you hear this word today, they may well be tottering or becoming smaller and less threatening. "The battle is the Lord and he will give you into our hand." That is the victorious spirit which God gives to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Thanks be to God.