

If you look at the cover of your bulletin, you will see that I had a Father's Day sermon in mind for today.

Our Gospel lesson seems particularly relevant to men--those of us who have children of our own and those of us who take care of people in a fatherly way.

Jesus is in a boat with the disciples when a storm rises and threatens the safety of all.

It is a story which has been meaningful to the church; a boat, with a cross for its mast is a common church symbol.

We still call the long, central aisle of a church building a nave, from the Latin, *navis*, meaning "boat."

Thus we have long believed the church is an arc of sorts, a place of safety, a sanctuary for all people. We are in this boat together, and in our voyage we encounter rough seas, indeed.

We fathers do what we can to keep our families safe; it is part of the nature of fatherhood; and part of this safety is to prepare for them journey, to prepare our spouses and our children and those we love for the storms of life.

We men are realists. We know that we can't protect those we love from all of life's tumults, so we do all we can to prepare them for it.

I had in mind a call to fathers to bring themselves and their children to church, to see Saturday Evenings as a family time, to have sleepovers at your house, and then to bring the family to church, into the boat, to prepare those we love for the voyage ahead, over which we have no more control than we have control over the weather.

However, on this Father's Day I am thinking of Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina; I am thinking of our black brothers and

sisters who will come to church today amid a furious storm; I am thinking about what we white Christians have to say and what we are called to do in the wake of the assassination of Pr. Clementa Pinckney and of our black brothers and sister in Christ who were massacred this week.

I want to talk to fathers and mothers about what we will say to our children and whether we are being faithful if we choose to "protect their innocence" when black children do not have the privilege of such innocence, and I want to remember a prayer we say every time we celebrate communion together:

May our every prayer be an action that brings healing, reconciliation and hope to a broken and hurting world.

We all know the story of David and Goliath. If ever there was a time when we have faced Goliath, this is such a time, so let us read David and Saul talking and Saul trying to protect David for his battle with Goliath, and how David responds as we prayerfully seek how we are to respond the giant we now face.

1 Sam. 17:32-40

David said to Saul, 'Let no one's heart fail because of [Goliath]; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.' Saul said to David, 'You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for 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, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God.' David said, 'The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.' So Saul said to David, 'Go, and may the Lord be with you!'

Saul clothed David with his armour; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul's sword over the armour, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then 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, in the pouch; 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, ruddy and handsome in appearance. The Philistine said to David, 'Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?' And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, 'Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field.' 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; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may

know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand.'

When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly towards the battle line to meet the Philistine. 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.

Stones for Mother Emanuel

Malcom Gladwell's most recent book is called David and Goliath. Gladwell provides scientific information about the battle between David and Goliath.

I posted a link to the church's FB page so you can listen to Gladwell's TED talk if you'd like. I am indebted to Gladwell for his fine writing, and for changing the way we read this story.

Saul and his army met Goliath and the Philistines in Sheffala, in a lovely place called the Valley of Elah.

The battle between David and Goliath was common custom three-thousand years ago called Single combat--a way of settling disputes without incurring the bloodshed of a major battle.

David is supposed to be the underdog; the battle between David and Goliath has become a metaphor for improbable victories by someone weaker over someone far stronger.

But he is not an underdog. His weapon is not a slingshot, not a child's toy. It is a devastating weapon.

It was a little pouch with two slings, which David spun at six or seven revolutions per second, launching a projectile at 35 meters per second. The Valley of Elah has a particular kind of stone there, Barium Sulphate, which is twice the density of normal stones.

If you do the calculations of the ballistics, of the stopping power of these stones spun and thrown from a sling, you would find that the projectile would be roughly equal to the power of a .45 millimeter handgun.

Many decisive battles were won by the artillery, by "slingers." David is a slinger; he is an artilleryman.

We know from historical records that experienced slingers could maim or kill a target at distances of up to 200 yards.

From medieval tapestries, we know that slingers were able to hit birds in flight.

Goliath is a heavy infantry fighter who expects that he is going to be fighting another heavy infantry fighter.

Saul, perhaps like a good father, tries to give David armor, to make him into an infantry fighter like Goliath.

But David has been using his artillery skills all his life; this is where his strength lies. He cannot be made into an infantryman. He is a an artilleryman.

He is to fight a lumbering giant weighed down with hundreds of pounds of bronze armor; and the only way the giant can fight is in close, hand-to-hand combat.

Goliath is a sitting duck. He doesn't have a chance against David.

So why do we keep calling David an underdog and his victory as improbable?

There is more.

Goliath is not what he seems to be.

Goliath is led onto the field by an attendant, moving slowly, which seems odd for a mighty warrior.

Goliath says, "Am I a dog that you should come to me with sticks?"

David has only one stick.

Giantism is often a medical condition, a form of acromegaly, a benign tumor on the pituitary gland causing abnormal production of human growth hormone.

Do you remember Andre the Giant? He had acromegaly.

Those suffering from acromegaly have distinct symptoms, most principally, problems with vision. When the tumor grows, it frequently presses on the optical nerve, often resulting in either double-vision or extreme nearsightedness.

So, why does Goliath move so slowly and have to be escorted?

Why does he seem oblivious and why is he so slow to respond to the fact that David is not going to fight him in hand-to-hand combat?

Why does he say, "Come to me?"

It is a sign of his vulnerability. He is saying, "I can't see you."

Why does he say, "Am I a dog that you should come to me with sticks?"

He sees two sticks when David has only one.

The very thing that was the source of Goliath's apparent strength was also his greatest weakness.

Giants are not as powerful as they seem to be, and sometimes a shepherd boy has a sling in his pocket.

Giants are not what they appear to be, and all the chatter that suggests to us how we ought to arm ourselves to fight the Giant of racism that visited Mother Emanuel this week is asking us to trade in the devastating weapons God has given us for armor that will only weigh us down and give power to Goliath.

And friends; White Friends: just as we must not trade the power of God for the puny weapons of giants, so also we must not hide in the trees and let our black brothers and sisters go into the valley to fight this battle alone.

As you have seen this morning we held VBS this week at the church; we have been equipping little Davids and Davidas for the voyage ahead of them, and we have been talking with them about the power of God. We taught our children that God has the power to:

To Provide: Hold On!

To Comfort: Hold On!

To Heal: Hold On!

To Forgive: Hold On!

To Love us forever: Hold On!

Now I want to talk to the children about what it means to "Hold On" and what they will learn about the power of God in the coming days.

Watch the people of Mother Emanuel and you will see the power of God and you will see God providing, comforting, healing, forgiving, and loving all of God's children forever.

Watch the people of this congregation who cry and pray and send money to their black brothers and sisters in Christ at Mother Emanuel AME Church.

And pay attention to the bluster of giants, who holler about this and that, who peddle in fear, who want us to come close to them so they can kill our faith and destroy our community.

Everyone of us; every child who sent a card to Mother Emanuel, every adult who prays and sends money, every person who talks about the lumbering giant of racial terrorism, every one of us is as a stone from the Valley of Elah, a stone of provision, comfort, healing, forgiveness, and love flung at the blind and stumbling giant of racism that will fall just as surely as Goliath fell, so hold on.

Hold on to the power of God and God will hold on to you.

Fathers: Parents: Grandparents: Even our youngest children notice when we turn off the news, and alter our conversations when they are around.

Because they are our children and grandchildren, they feel what we feel though their understanding of these feelings comes later.

Even if we manage to protect them against news and information getting to them inside your home, we know our children are open-hearted; they take in the world around them; we cannot protect them against giants; we must rather prepare them for the giants they will surely face.

Talk with them about Mother Emanuel.

Talk with them about racism and let them know how sad and angry it makes you. Tell them we call racism a sin, that it breaks God's heart, too.

Help them to see the power of God not only in the people of Mother Emanuel, not only in the people of this congregation, but in you as you fulfill your sacred duty as a parent to prepare your children for the Goliaths they will someday face.

This moment belongs to all of us. This is a time for the church to rise up as David rose up and to contend with this Goliath.

I invite you, in the name of God who is Father to join with Mother Emanuel as we, all God's children, slay the giant of racism together.

May our every prayer be an action that brings healing, reconciliation, and hope to a broken and hurting world.