

Against All Odds

Samuel 17:32-49; Mark 4:35-41

Gotta love that story of David and Goliath. A little guy wins? Are you kidding me? It's not probably surprising to very many people that I'm the one who's up here talking about the Ecumenicals, the partnership stuff and all of those pieces, but I want to focus on one area of that scripture and, really, of our life that I often think we forget. David was encouraged to put on the whole armor of God, or at least the whole armor of his father Saul. "Take as much protection as you can and go into battle." And David said, "Well, I kind of feel weighed down by all this stuff, so excuse me while I take it all off." (Sally takes off her stoll) 'Cause after all, I don't want to have anything holding me back. (She takes off her sweater) I'm going to stop now – Doug told me before I came up here that I should keep my shirt on. 'Cause people have been telling me my whole life to keep my shirt on. Wait, wait! Wait! No more. No more wait. No more wait. We have an amazing opportunity in our life as a church, as a people, as a community, as a faith group, to make ourselves vulnerable and step into the world and say, "We want to walk in solidarity with you." Now, of course, the Philistines weren't really up for that; solidarity wasn't their thing. And so, David took what he had, which was his own faith and his own vulnerability and stood firm in the face of all of that and said no more. Vulnerability takes huge, huge, huge faith. Vulnerability takes huge, huge, huge courage. We make ourselves open to the slings and arrows, you see, today can be full of all kinds of images because they were all there in that passage. The slings and arrows of those who are filled with hatred – when we make ourselves vulnerable, it always feels like we are likely to get struck down as soon as we step out of the house. But I've learned a couple of things as part of the little journey that I've made as one of the Ecumenicals of the world. And Karen was right – you don't see very many of us necessarily in the building, because most of us have collected somewhere else. A few of us, for some strange, unknown reason, went into ministry. What? What's up with that? Oh, it was that God thing, that call thing that some get...that's weird. Come into ministry and be vulnerable to the possibly that you get shot down, over and over and over again. And do it anyway. So, learnings: I've learned that they can't kill me. They can't kill me. They can threaten, they can take my bodily life, but they can't kill me. So no matter what happens, whatever energy those of us who are the Ecumenicals have already stood up in the world, that energy will go on and on and on and on because God said so. Because the Spirit is alive. They can't kill us. There was an amazing musician whose name I am sadly not going to remember (someone out there probably will and did, it's Victor Jara). A musician in, I'm gonna say, Nicaragua during the coup of the '70s and

'80s who was arrested because he kept going on singing songs about peace and love and hope and justice. Heaven forbid. And so he was arrested, of course, and taken to a huge coliseum where, well I think, images of Daniel in the lion's den pops into mind. But the coliseum was filled with people who had also been arrested. And they forgot – well, they neglected to take his guitar away from him. So once he got into the building, he started playing his music. And the crowd erupted and sang along. So they took his guitar away. So? He got up and he directed and the crowd stood on their feet and sang along. So they cut off his hands. And with blood flowing, he sang until they shot him. And then the crowd continued to sing anyway. Justice does not come without a price. But it does come. I had a fascinating experience this week. For starters, the hybrids; we bought a hybrid this week! I could hardly believe it. It's, you know, a used hybrid and someone's already broken it in for us I guess, but a hybrid nonetheless, and at \$1.31, of course you're gonna buy a hybrid. While we were talking to one of the Folk, it became abundantly clear to him that we were a couple, and so he asked us a simple question which people often do: how long have you been together? And once we had clarified that it was 24 years in November, we kind of both said wow. And he said wow. And he said, what was it like 24 years ago? And I said, oh, well, there were a few moments, but 20 years ago wasn't nearly as bad as 40 years ago, and so I told him some stories. And he was going, what? What? No, what? No, people didn't really. No, yes. And then, I kinda just asked him about his life. Well, it turns out he was in Kosovo until he was nine years old. And at the age of nine, his family had... count it... five minutes, five minutes to gather their belongings and get in the back of a moving van and go with the rest of the people in the village before the Serbs arrived, and they were coming and they were kicking in doors and they were slaughtering people willingly. I said, wow. You've seen some stuff in your life too. And he said, well, I suppose, but really, my parents were amazing. I don't know how they did it, but my parents turned it into a game. We were, you know, all going to go on this fun journey at the end of which there was going to be a wonderful place to live that was full of candy. And so they got out, and he has had a wonderful place to live. These are the things that break the heart of an Ecumenical. And they are the things also that inspire Ecumenicals to find other Ecumenicals to gather together in groups to go out and do that work and, sadly, indeed one of the things that happens is burnout because, you know, I've got a drawer full of t-shirts. Actually, at one point I thought about putting them all on and taking them all off. There's the red one for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. There's the orange one for Every Child Matters. I have a few of these of course because, after all, it's been my life. I have anti-racism buttons. I have Indigenous Peoples Day buttons. I have green shirts that talk about working for Greenpeace. I have a drawer full. And that too can start to feel like the whole armor of God that has to be thrown off so that we become vulnerable also to the Spirit of life. It's at those moments that we need a good friend to say, "I think it's time for a cup of coffee. To talk about how you're doing. Because we're past burnout and into something else." I just want to share, because after all, I went online and did a little research. I'd hate to waste it. Just this about Indigenous Sunday: As Chelsea Vowel, a Métis woman from the Plains Cree speaking community of Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta, writes: "If we think of territorial

acknowledgement as sites of potential disruption, they can be transformative acts that for some extent undo Indigenous erasure. I believe this is true as long as these acknowledgements discomfort both those speaking and hearing the words. The fact of Indigenous presence should force non-Indigenous peoples to confront their own place on these lands.” And we could insert the fact of Muslim presence, the fact of LGBTQ etc. presence, the fact of Asian presence...we can insert many. It is all here in a way to make us uncomfortable. May it be so.