

Chapel Words (April 22, 2008) – by Rev. Jim Holland

My sons are 19 and 22 years old. I often watched the made-for-kids movies with them when they were small. What I came to see over time is that there are just three basic themes that encompass nearly all movies made for children. The first is the “Lonely kid bonds with animal: theme; *Free Willy*, *MVP*, *Air Bud*, *Beethoven* are just a few examples I can think of off the top of my head. These were also famous when I was a kid. I think of *Lassie*, *My Friend Flicka*, *Rin Tin Tin* and *Flipper*.

Then there is the kids outwit the adults plot: *Home Alone*, *Matilda*, *Ritchie Rich*, *Heavy Weights*. And, of course, this one began with the *Parent Trap*.

Then there is the group of nerdy kids who can’t run ten feet without tripping, but who become a sports team, and through dedication and sheer force of will, overcome impossible odds, and beat the best team in the league: *Mighty Ducks*, *the Big Green*, *Angels in the Outfield*, etc, etc, etc.

One recent series of books being turned into movies combines all three of these themes: the main characters all have special animal friends, they are always trying to outwit the adults, and they are constantly facing an enemy who is infinitely more powerful, and yet they, or rather one of the characters, is always able to defeat him. I refer, of course, to the *Harry Potter* series.

I’m not going to talk specifically about Harry Potter today, but I promise to do so in the future. Today I want to talk about the theme of overcoming enormous odds. And this is the part where I sneak in some stuff about a biblical character. The person I have in mind is most famous for beating an enemy that is far stronger and more powerful. In fact, his battle with this giant is one of the most famous stories in the Hebrew Bible, and one of the most famous fights in history. I am talking, as you might have guessed, about David and Goliath. David became the second King of Israel, and his dynasty lasted for 1000 years. It was from David’s family that Jesus was born. David was the greatest King of Israel. He was a musician and poet who is believed to have written many of the psalms.

But as important as David is to the history of Israel, for most people he is famous primarily for being a whiz with a slingshot. We all know the outlines of the story. Among the Philistines is a giant named Goliath, and the Philistines challenge the Israelites to select a warrior of their own to fight him. God directs the Israelites to send a young teenager, named David, who has just come down from the hills where he has been tending his father’s sheep. David is God’s chosen champion and he slays Goliath with a well-placed stone to the forehead.

This story is designed to establish David as a man of skill and courage, but this little story has become part of our language. When we say that something is a “David and Goliath story” everyone knows what that means. It is a situation in which a small and weak person or organization takes on a far stronger and larger person, organization or challenge with no hope of success, and somehow, the weaker of the two manages to succeed.

A David and Goliath story is a story of superior courage and intelligence overcoming superior strength. These are almost always inspirational stories about good overcoming evil. And as someone said, nobody cheers for Goliath. We have all heard lots of David and Goliath stories, and perhaps we have had the experience of overcoming some Goliath ourselves. Perhaps we have met challenges and difficulties that seemed insurmountable. The message of David and Goliath is

that if we are really determined and if keep our wits about us, we can succeed even when things seem futile. But very often the Goliath that we must face is not “out there.”

Emily Dickinson, in a little poem, says this:

*I took my Power in my Hand—
And went against the World—
'Twas not so much as David—had—
But I—was twice as bold—*

*I aimed my Pebble—but Myself
Was all the one that fell—
Was it Goliath—was too large—
Or was myself— too small?*

It is almost always the case that the Goliath that is the biggest threat to us is the one inside ourselves. It is almost always the case that when we are defeated by a problem or a challenge, it is we who defeat ourselves. Courage is important, skill is important, intelligence is important, but ultimately it is our willpower, our commitment to the thing we want to accomplish that will in the end determine whether we accomplish it or not.