Bnk 6

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"FIGHTING WITHOUT ARMOR" Selections from I Samuel 17

The armies of Israel and Philistia were on opposite sides of the valley testing and defying one another. Each morning the giant Goliath would come out and shout, "Don't you have any man among you who will come out and fight with me? If he is able to fight me and kill me, then we will be your servants, but if I win, then you will be our servants." Instead of having the armies fight each other, Goliath suggested that the issue be settled by just two men fighting.

But each day the army of Israel could find no one with enough courage to face Goliath. This had been going on for 40 days.

It was the custom in those days for the families of the soldiers to send food to family members who were in the army. So Jesse, who had his three eldest sons in the army, sent the young shepherd boy David, their brother, with some corn and bread for his older brothers. Jesse also wanted David to bring back news as to how the army and his sons were doing.

When David came to his brothers near the front line, it was the time of day when Goliath made his regular appearance. David, seeing the challenge to the army of Israel asked two questions: "Who is this heathen Philistine that is defying the armies of God?" and "What's the reward for the man who kills this giant?" With his questions, David implied that he was willing to fight Goliath.

When King Saul heard about David's questions, he sent for him. Now David was more outspoken. He told the king--"Don't let Goliath scare the whole army, I will go and fight with this giant." But the king replied, "You are only a young man inexperienced in the ways of war. How can you handle this giant Goliath?" David who was wise in the ways of the fields as a shepherd, said that he had once fought a bear and a lion while protecting his father's sheep. He said that he could certainly then fight with this heathen Philistine who had defied the armies of God. Furthermore, David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the lion and the bear will deliver me from this giant."

In an attempt to help, King Saul told David to wear his armor. So they brought out the King's armor and put it on David's shoulders and give him a large sword. But as David tried to move while wearing the heavy armor, he had difficulty so he said, "I can't fight with this armor. It doesn't fit. It's too heavy and I'm not used to it. I've got to go without armor of th is kind, in my own simplicity, in my own experience and with tools I'm used to." So David took his shepherds staff, chose five smooth stones from the brook, took his sling and went to meet Goliath.

As he got near Goliath, the giant was insulted. He said to David, "Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks? I'm going to feed your flesh to the birds." David, however, put one of his stones in his sling, aimed for the giant's forehead, hit him there and knocked him out. Then David tooks Goliath's own sword and killed him. When the Philistine army saw that their champion was dead, the fled in fear.

This story of David and Goliath tells us several things about the armor we have or don't have.

1. Note first that it's a mistake to borrow and use someone else's armor. It won't fit and will only hinder you. David knew this. Saul's armor wasn't for him. He had to go in his own strength and in his own integrity. David had to be himself if he was going to win.

We're not always as wise as David. Sometimes we try to borrow other people's armor for our lives. We borrow all sorts of defenses and try to use them in our dealings with other people.

Last year a best-selling book for many weeks was entitled--"Winning Through Intimidation." The author tries to convince his readers that we can put on armor that makes us tough and win with it by intimidating others. He's really asking the reader to be something that he or she is not and in the long run it doesn't work. It's better to fight without armor than to try to use someone elses's.

2. Secondly this story of David and Goliath reminds us that too much armor of any kind, even though our own, ultimately proves a burden and destroys us. Look at Goliath, with heavy armor all over his body. But the very

armor he wore and carried to defend himself, enabled David with his freedom of movement, his flexibility of action, and the naturalness and simplicity of his own experience to conquer the giant with a slingshot. Too much armor will prove a hindrance to any one of us.

Note what happens when we wear the heavy armor of defensiveness. We say, "No-body is going to hurt me. I'll be tough as nails. I won't risk trusting anyone." So we drive potential friends away. We have so much armor on that no one will even get close to us. Then the more we resist others, the heavier our armor becomes, and the more people stay away from us. People with heavy armor are the loneliest people in the world.

Others of us wear the armor of self-righteousness. We can never admit we are wrong and we are certain that no one can win in any kind of contest with us, particularly no one like David who wears no armor.

Years ago when Ralph Nader was beginning, he was like David going against Goliath, no matter what you think of Mr. Nader today. His first book entitled, "Unsafe at Any Speed," was an expose of the dangers of one particular automobile, the Corvair. The auto manufacturer with all armor of defensiveness and self-righteousness did its best to attack Mr. Nader. They spied on him, tried to lure him into compromising situations with women, and in the end the President of the Corporation was forced to make a public apology for what they had tried to do to Mr. Nader.

How much better it would've been for everyone if the company had simply said in the first place, "We made a mistake. That car is unsafe and we're going to do our best to correct it." Why is that so difficult for any of us to do?

The fact is that ultimately victory always goes to those who are simple, creative, open and flexible rather than to those of us who try to hide behind heavy armors of defensiveness and self-righteousness.

This is true for businesses, for churches, and it is true for us as individuals. It is true for nations as well.

The business that cannot be open, admit its mistakes and the adapt to changing conditions and remain creative

finally fails. A church that cannot adapt to meet the people where they are hurting will be defeated by its own cumbersome armor of dogma and self-righteousness. And the same is true for us as individuals.

There are so many kinds of heavy armor we wear that weigh us down.

Recently I came across a story about a man whose work was his defensive armor and he worked himself to death. The obituary didn't say that of course. It said he died of a coronary thrombosis. This man was a perfect Type A, a classic. He was 51 years old when he died and he was a vice-president of the company he worked for. He was, however one of six vice-presidents and one of three who might conceivably--if the president died or retired soon enough--have moved to the top spot. He knew that.

He worked six days a week, five of them until 8:00 or 9:00 at night. He had no outside extracurricular interests. He was overweight by 20 to 25 pounds. On Saturdays he wore a sports jacket to the office instead of a suit, because it was the weekend.

He was survived by his wife, 48 years old. She had, according to her daughter, given up trying to compete with his work years ago when the children were small. A company friend said, "I know how much you will miss him," and she answered, "I've been missing him for years."

His children said that whenever their father was alone with them, which was not often,theyhad nothing to say to each other. The man's work was his armor. Few people could even get close to him. And his armor finally destroyed him.

But why do some of us need so much armor? We wear armor in proportion to our fear. The more fearful and afraid of life and people we are, the more armor we try to put on.

3. The third thing this story of David and Goliath tells us about armor is that whatever armor we have it has to suit us, and not be a cover-up for fear or anything else.

David's armor was that he was not afraid to be himself. He had inner confidence and he had confidence in God.

David's ultimate armor was his faith in God, and that does not weigh us down, but lifts us up. David said, "I am going out in the name of the Lord with my integrity, my individuality, my own unique gifts. I know who I am. I know my strengths and my weaknesses. That's armor of a totally different kind.

It's not the unafraid person who is brutal and brittle. It is the uncertain, unsure person who tries to be tough and mean because he or she is inwardly soft and afraid. The armor is a cover-up.

The best armor of all is openness or no armor at all. When we are open and trust others, we ourselves make fewer mistakes. Of course, trusting others is always a risk. But it's a risk either way. If you trust, you might get hurt. But if you do not trust, you are going to get hurt for certain.

Furthermore, we are not only our brother's and sister's keeper, but also their maker. In trusting another person, you help that person to emerge. In not trusting another person, you diminish that person. In diminishing the person you create your own enemy.

The point is that we can't be carrying a heavy armor and at the same time be trusting other people. The heavy armors we often wear are barriers to trust and openness.

So it is that our Christian faith calls us to be open and vulnerable people. And to be open and vulnerable is to have that quality which enables a person to be defenseless, unfettered by ties of fear; unchained by ideologies; uncharted by pre-determined goals; it is to lack the will to impose or manipulate.

We are called to be open receptive persons, those who wear no armor and who can be approached and loved.

That is a different kind of armor. It is the armor of God. The letter to the Ephesians describes it this way--
Put on the whole armor of God, having girded your loins with truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith; and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.

We are to deal with life in courage and trust instead of agression, revenge and defensiveness. When we dare to go out and face life, death, youth, age, success, failure, recession and other problems as David did, then Goliath always falls on his face. Amen.