

January 18, 2015

Overwhelmed!

Overwhelmed with Self-Expectations!

1 Samuel 17:32-40

Opening words: John H. Johnson once said, "Dream small dreams. If you make them too big, you get overwhelmed and you don't do anything. If you make small goals and accomplish them, it gives you the confidence to go on to higher goals." I am not so sure how I feel about that quote. However, it does lead to an interesting question. When was the last time you were overwhelmed?

Today, I continue my sermon series called *Overwhelmed*. When was the last time you were overwhelmed by your own expectations? Each one of us wants to live the American dream. Everyone wants to own their own home. Everyone wants to be respected by their peers. Everyone wants to experience success in their profession and be well compensated. Everyone wants to drive their own car. Everyone wants to have college educated children. Everyone wants to retire comfortably someday with a large sum of money in the bank. We expect a great deal, but sometimes we are disappointed. It is sad but true. We are overwhelmed by our own expectations. If you have ever been disappointed by your own expectations, then this message is for you. Let me call this message *Overwhelmed with Self-Expectations!* Our scripture lesson for today is 1 Samuel 17:32-40.

1 Samuel 17:32-40 David said to Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him."³³ Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth."

³⁴ But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock,³⁵ I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it.³⁶ Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God.³⁷ The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine."

Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you."

³⁸ Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head.³⁹ David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them.

"I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off.⁴⁰ Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

This story makes me think. Mark Hatfield served as a United States senator from the state of Oregon for thirty years. He once visited Mother Teresa in Calcutta and experienced her work first-hand. The sight was overwhelming to the senator. Hundreds lined up for medical attention with little hope for a cure. He found the suffering unbearable. At one point he looked at the saintly Albanian woman and asked, "How can you bear the load without being crushed by it?". Mother Teresa replied, "My dear Senator, I am not called to be successful, I am called to be faithful." If you can understand that simple story, then you can understand this morning's message. If you understood that story, say, **"Amen!"**

We continue our sermon series in the seventh chapter of First Samuel. It is important that you know some background of the book itself. Originally, First Samuel and Second Samuel stood as a single literary piece. They were separated by the writer of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). The author is unknown but the date is 950 BC. Both books are significant because they tell of how God created a monarchy in Israel. Samuel was the one who anointed the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. By the seventeenth chapter of First Samuel, Saul's reign has been ruled a failure by God. A new leader is grabbing the nation's attention: David. You know this morning's story because it is part of the fabric of our culture.

Israel was at war against the Philistines. The greatest warrior in the Philistine's camp was a man by the name of Goliath. He is described not just as a warrior, he is described as a champion. He must have been quite a sight. According to the scriptures, he stood nine feet tall (1 Samuel 17:4) and wore the finest clothes for battle that money could buy (1 Samuel 17:5-7). I have to say it. He did not just impress his enemies, he impressed himself. Feeling invincible, he challenges the Israelites to a duel to the death, winner takes all (1 Samuel 17:8-11). The question that filled Israel's camp was, who would battle Goliath? The answer to that question is the most unlikely warrior, David. Who is David? He is not a professional soldier, he is a shepherd boy, who was a visitor to the camp. David volunteers and has to convince King Saul he is qualified. The king concedes and offers David the necessary equipment for war. David rejects them, and only takes five smooth stones from the stream and his sling (1 Samuel 17:40). You know how the story ends. By sunset, the battle is over and the Philistines are defeated. The next line is not pretty. David cuts off Goliath's head with his (Goliath's) own sword. That victory leads to the rise of David and the fall of Saul. If that story sounds familiar to you, say, **"Amen!"**

The story of David and Goliath is not just the story of an ancient battle. It is really the story of our world. It is really the story of a timeless debate between the world and the teaching of the church regarding self-worth. Goliath represents the world, which teaches us our value comes from *who* we are. David represents the church, which teaches us our value comes from *whose* we are. Goliath had confidence because he had everything needed for success. David had confidence because he was a child of God. Are you more like David? Are you more like Goliath? It is a fair question.

On the one hand, each one has been blessed by God in many ways. We do have something to offer the world. On the other hand, each one of us is a child of God. The world tells us we are important because of who we are. The church and the world have been debating the source of confidence for years. In our time in history, it appears the world is winning the debate.

Do you have anyone in your life whose value comes from their possessions and their connections? I do. They are always trying to impress me. They try to impress me with their most recent purchase. They try to impress me with the things they know. They try to impress me with the people they know. Can I tell you the truth? I am not impressed. Every time I see this person he asks me the same question, "Russ, do you know so and so?" Every time I respond, "No! I'm a preacher who was raised in a steel town in northern Ohio. I don't know anyone. I know the people that Jesus loves!" Now don't get me wrong. I am not mad at this person. I feel sorry for him because he is always trying to validate himself with his possessions and connections. I would think he was great if he didn't own anything or know anyone. The spiritually immature always try to find value in things. The spiritually mature find their value in God. Goliath may have been nine feet tall, but he was spiritually immature. He is not alone.

You are in luck! Did you know the most expensive house in America is for sale? It is called the "Palace of Love" and comes with a \$195 million price tag. Located in Beverly Hills, California, it sits on 25 acres of land and offers 53,000 square feet of living space. The property also boasts a 27-car garage and a vineyard. The owner is real estate mogul Jeff Green, who is renting it out now for \$475,000 per month. According to the world's definition of success, you are a success once you buy the palace of love. I'll be glad to come for a visit!

Did you know the most expensive new American car is the 2014 Dodge Viper SRT? It can be yours for a mere \$102,485. It can go 0 - 60 in three seconds, run the quarter of a mile in 11.5 seconds and hit a top speed of 206 mph. It will get you to the grocery store fast! According to the world's definition of success, you are a success once you buy a Viper SRT. You could take me for a ride!

Back in March of 2014, the annual Academy Awards show was held. All the movers and shakers of Hollywood were present. Ellen DeGeneres decided it would be fun to take a "selfie" with the A-listers in the audience. She wanted it to be the most tweeted photo of all time. It was retweeted more than 750,000 times in the first 45 minutes. The people who were in the selfie included some of Hollywood's Who's Who. There was Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt, Meryl Streep, Julia Roberts, Bradley Cooper, Jennifer Lawrence and the rest. There were other celebrities who weren't in the picture. They wanted to be part of that exclusive group. According to the world's definition of success, you are a success if you were in that picture. The world tells us we are valuable based on our possessions and our connections. How many of your expectations are simply a validation that you have worth? If that is your story, then you are like Goliath.

The church tells us we have value without the house, without the car and without the screwed-up Hollywood friends. Our value does not come from who we are. Our value comes from whose we are. That was David's story. He had value because he was a child of God, and so are you! Never forget it. You are a disciple of Jesus Christ. That means you are striving to be a little more like Jesus every day. Jesus said in last week's scripture, *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"* (Matthew 6:33). You do not need an advanced degree to understand that passage. It means the driving force in your life is God. There is nothing wrong having possessions or friends, until they become distractions from your primary pursuit in life, God! It is not a question of lowering your expectations. It is a matter of redefining success. David rejected the equipment needed for success. David knew he was valuable because he belonged to God, and so are you! Our possessions and connections do not affect our value as a person. We can be content. We are valuable with or without them. You are a child of God. If you can remember that, say, **"Amen!"**

The other day I received my first piece of information about Annual Conference 2015. It is one of the most valued traditions within the United Methodist Church. Annually, the various conferences around the country gather to conduct the business of the church. There is an equal vote between laity and clergy. It is just as exciting as it sounds. This year will be extra exciting. We are voting to send delegates to General Conference and Jurisdictional Conference. The job of General Conference is to rewrite the Book of Discipline, which contains the rules of the church. The job of the Jurisdictional Conference is to elect new bishops. There is more than a little politics involved. Every Annual Conference can nominate one person to be a bishop.

Recently, I heard the story about a man who was selected by his Annual Conference to be nominated to be a bishop. He was well liked and respected. He did an outstanding job and loved the Lord. The people who believed in him thought he would jump at the opportunity to be elected a bishop. It is a prestigious job within our denomination. If you look through a worldly lens, the bishops are the only real successes in this system. When they asked for his blessing to nominate him, he shocked them by saying, "No!" Then he told them why. In his home he had a son with autism. Being autistic meant his son needed stability. Being a bishop meant he would have to move. Being a bishop meant he would work long hours. Being a bishop meant there would be no routine in their home. He said, "If being bishop means hurting my son, then it isn't worth it. I wouldn't hurt my son for the world." Answer this question for me. Was the man a success or a failure? Through the eyes of God he was a success! Let me paraphrase Mother Teresa, *"We are not called to be successful, we are called to be faithful."* What is your story? Are you more interested in being successful, or faithful? And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**