

This third Sunday in October we as the church find ourselves in the heart of what has traditionally been stewardship season: a time in which we ask everyone participating in the life and ministries of the church to prayerfully consider how much you will give/ pledge for the new year. Over the course of many decades, stewardship in the church has had many different meanings and purposes, but it has become most known for financial contributions. You have been hearing for weeks now about FPC’s narrative budget and aspirations for where God is calling us in 2023. Hopefully you have also received a letter and copy of the narrative budget in the mail. If not, we would be happy to be sure you get one. We wouldn’t want anyone to miss out on the opportunity to partner with God through the many wonderful things happening here at FPC. Whether it is worship, education, outreach, or resources, financial support is needed at all-time highs for us to meet God where God is calling. Each gift given is a way for God to pull us together and I do indeed pray that you will consider your commitment and pledge to partner with God and one another in 2023. We hope all will turn in their pledge by next Sunday, October 23, but understand that if you need a bit more time, we will be happy to receive your gifts anytime.

With all this in mind, it would be traditional for me to consider one of many different inspirational scriptures calling us to give our 10% or not give until it hurts but give until it feels good or the Christian responsibility we have to be good stewards of what we have been given by God or discuss where our treasure is there our heart will be also. All good things.

But the text for today doesn’t go there. You are welcome! Instead, our inspirational scripture text invites us to dive deeper into the meaning of faithful stewardship for us as the church through the concept of “becoming.” Before we get to the text in 1 Samuel, let me share what I mean by “becoming.”

The process of becoming is a process of positive change (or development). It recognizes that where we are is not where we will always be. We all “become” as time and life and circumstances and experiences impact and help influence us. We are, none of us, the same as we once were, but with God’s power and promise and presence and protection, we are able to “become” more. This is true of us individually and communally as God’s church.

With this definition of “becoming” in mind, let’s turn to our reading from 1 Samuel 17.

Read 1 Samuel 17:32-47

The Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

Our scripture focus for today is a familiar story. In this corner, standing a mere 5’ something, adorning a simple cloak and holding a mere sling and 5 smooth stones, the youngest son of Jesse, the shepherd boy... David. And in the other corner, standing near 10’, adorning 150 lbs. of armor and holding a 19 lb. spearhead, a Philistine from Gath, the champion... Goliath.

The facing off of David verses Goliath is what we are likely most familiar with. Probably because it is an underdog story in which David rises up against the odds to defeat the mighty Goliath. As a matter of fact, the fight itself is not that interesting. The battle ended before everyone present even blinked and their jaws had a chance to drop. If you looked away for a mere moment, you would have missed the whole thing. David takes a stone in his sling and nails Goliath in the forehead and the giant falls. David wins!

So, what? What is the big deal? We have heard this story before. It is a story from hundreds of years ago of a shepherd boy defeating a giant in a battle. True! However, if that is all we take away from it we might very well be missing the point.

In addition to this story being about David overcoming Goliath, the context of the event reveals that it is also a story about the ongoing war between Israel and the Philistines. With David's victory over Goliath, the Philistines retreat. So not only did David win, but Israel wins. But still, that is not all.

For starters, the point of telling the many stories in the bible is not to highlight only the characters' names in which we read like David and Goliath or the Israelites. The point of the story within the bible is to draw testimony to the strength and power of God within and behind and around the characters and circumstances. The most important question we can ask when reading stories from the bible is "Where is God?" in the story. And after asking that, going one step further to consider beyond our imagination or own logic what it is God might be doing or saying through the characters or circumstances.

When we make these considerations with this story, what I think we can learn, and I think it is always an important thing to remember and celebrate, is that with God's power and promise and presence and protection upon us, like it was with David and the Israelites, we can "become" able to accomplish all God is calling us to. We can hold on to, lean into, depend on, and trust in the truth that no matter how big the obstacles or challenges in front of us seem to be in this world, our victory is with and in God!

If we take a step back and consider David and all we can learn about him through the scriptures (which we have more information about David than any other person in the bible including Jesus), the series of events that unfold in this section of 1 Samuel are but a small part of David's "becoming" who God was calling him to be.

Saul was the King of Israel at the time. God was the true King, but the people insisted on having their own earthly king to rule for them, so Saul got appointed. To make a long story short, Saul proved to be less than ideal because he tended to operate on his own accord rather than God's. Saul's right-hand man was Samuel. Now Samuel was a faithful servant of God (he had been since his child rearing living with Eli the priest), and he had received a message from God that a new king was going to be anointed. Samuel was fearful of doing what God was asking him to because if Saul would hear of it, Saul would have him killed. God persists in his call of Samuel to go to Bethlehem and find Jesse, because it was one of his son's that would be the one anointed. Seven of Jesse's sons passed before Samuel but none of them were who God had in mind. Samuel asked if there were any more and Jesse called for his youngest, David, who was out tending the sheep. As David appeared, God informed Samuel that David was the one.

As chapter 17 begins, we learn that Israel is once again at war with the Philistines. As the two sides were poised on opposing mountains, Goliath came out of the camp of the Philistines and shouted, "Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." Saul and Israel were afraid. We can't possibly defeat Goliath and we can't afford to lose and become their servants. So, let's stall and wait it out. Goliath continued to present this offer to Israel morning and evening for 40 days. At this time, David remained with his father Jesse in Bethlehem. His older brothers were among those fighting with the Israelites and one day, Jesse asked David to carry some sustenance to his brothers. While among them, he began to ask questions. His brother Eliab became angry with him asking him why he was there and why he wasn't home tending the sheep. David turned aside and inquired more about the offer from the Philistine.

This is the part of the story we insert the section we read a moment ago. David didn't roll out of bed one day and think to himself, "I am going to pick a fight with a giant today and save Israel." No. Events took place. Things happened. People made choices and those choices had consequences and impacts on others around them. Amid it all, God was working to provide for the people of Israel through the development and anointing and calling and "becoming" of David. I can't help but wonder whether David even knew what was "becoming" of him. One day he was tending sheep and then became anointed by Samuel (by God). One he was playing the Lyre to help calm the troubled king Saul and another tended to his father's requests. One he found himself in the middle of a battle filled with wisdom and courage and strength and ability unbeknownst to a boy and another he displayed faith in God's power and promise and presence and protection over him. It sounds like it all happened in the blink of an eye, but it didn't. Who David was "becoming" was because of a series of positive change and development ushered in on the power of God upon him. As we can continue to read about David in the scriptures, God's power and presence with David continues. David becomes king and it is David's family line that God continues to work and deliver God's people. David wasn't perfect in his journey of "becoming" but he was committed to listening to God and faithful in his response to God's call to serve God's people the way God called him to and not his own.

On a bit lighter note, who here knows of Dr. Seuss and the story of *The Lorax*?

To get to the heart of the matter we can jump into the movie a bit when the Once-ler gets fixated on success and money, albeit pressured by his lack of popularity and accomplishment as a child coupled with the selfish desires and expectations of his family. Focused only on his new fame and success and family happiness, the Once-ler forgets his promise to the Lorax and in turn sacrifices the trees and the lives of the

creatures in the forest. Once the trees were gone, everything was lost. The town, ironically named Thneedville after the gift of thneeds from the trees, became boxed in, without a thneed or tree in sight. In the new town the people needed to purchase air because all the trees had gone. The Once-ler remained outside the town amid the forest he had destroyed. He retreated away, by himself, and did nothing.

A young and curious boy named Ted sought more than what was. Eventually he found himself talking with the Once-ler and learned through him what happened to all the trees and what had “become” of the town.

One day, the Once-ler told Ted, “I have been sitting here for years since the Lorax left, just staring at that word “unless” wondering what it means. I think I know now.”

“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot. Nothing is going to get better. It’s not.”

The Once-ler then gives the boy a gift, the last truffulla seed, and says, “You need to plant it, Ted.” Ted replies, “Yeah but, nobody cares about trees anymore.” “Then make them care. Plant the seed in the middle of town where everyone can see. Change the way things are. **Though it may seem small and insignificant, it is not about what it is, it is about what it can become.** That is not just a seed any more than you are just a boy.”

What does Ted do? Ted returns to town on a mission. He is filled with life and purpose and albeit if anyone is going to stand in his way. As you know or at least can anticipate, his mission to plant the seed is met with challenges. Those in control of the air control the town and the people in it and they know the threat a tree would be to their control. They tell of trees being awful and dirty, with the leaves falling to the ground and blowing all around. Some people who don’t know any better believe them. Ted’s grandmother is an example of those in town that know of life with trees and even though they didn’t have a choice when it was taken from them, she reflected on how nice it would be to have trees again. There are those in town who were born in the town with no trees and know nothing of trees. The story leaves us wondering how Ted was going to plant that seed with all the challenges and doubt and people trying to stop him? He would have to fight and stand tough and endure. He would have to speak truth and repeat it over and over again. He would need some help from close friends and family. He would need the wind (spirit) to blow in the right direction so he can be lifted to where he needs to be. He would need to listen to some, and he would need to ignore others who weren’t willing to help. He would need to commit.

The story of the Lorax reminds us that positive change can only happen when we finally begin to care enough. “Nothing is going to change, unless someone does something soon.” (Dr. Seuss)

For David and the Israelites, for Ted and Threadville, these stories are about “becoming.” And these stories can be inspiration for us, as we, individually and communally as the church, continue to “become” who God has created us to be.

“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot. Nothing is going to get better. It’s not.”

“Though it may seem small and insignificant, it is not about what it is, it is about what it can become.”

You are still “becoming” right? How much do you care about making things better for you? How committed and connected are you to God’s power and promise and presence and protection to help you in “becoming”?

And the church, it is still “becoming” right? Our worship, education, outreach, and resources? Where the church has been is not where the church is today and where the church is today is not where God will have it be in the future. How much do we care about participating in making things better for the church? And not just for our immediate satisfaction, but in faithful response to God so the church can be what it needs to be for generations to come. How committed and connected are we to God’s power and promise and presence and protection to help the church in “becoming”?

I want to encourage us to keep this in mind today. The prayers, praise, and price we offer in partnership with God and God’s church are not small and insignificant. They are each a part of something much bigger and better. Something “becoming”.

Let us pray...

Ever present, all powerful, only wise, and eternal God, we offer to you our praise and prayers. Through the power and presence of your Holy Spirit, we thank you God that you melt us, mold us, fill us, and use us according to your will. We thank you that we are not always the same, but “becoming” more each day what you have created each of us to be, individually and communally. We pray God that we may be inspired by your call to be good stewards of all you have given to us and our hearts and minds and bodies will be committed to partnering with you and your church here at First Presbyterian. Whether it is our worship and praise and singing, our learning and growing and teaching, our outreach and love and nurture, or our care of facilities and staff and investments, we know that our “becoming” is not possible without your providence and care. We trust in you to help guide us all in being faithful in our giving and sharing.

As we pray this morning, we acknowledge those who are having a difficult time with life circumstances and that tough times can distract us from you and the things you are calling us to do. We pray God for peace and hope for those who long for your eternal comfort and compassion. We pray God for understanding and wisdom for those who long for answers to “Why” this or that has happened the way it has. We pray God for perseverance and endurance for those whose next step may be the one to get them over the hump. We pray God for character and love for all of us as we continue to “become” beacons of your light and love in the world.

Your light is shining God. May we align ourselves to bask in your glow.
Your love is sowing God. May we align ourselves to share in your harvest.

Step by step. It is the only real way to move forward. May we be bold enough to step out in faith with you, in partnership with you, in trust that in you God is the only real and true life, here on earth and as it is in heaven... We pray all this in the name of your Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus, who taught us to say when praying... **Our Father...**