***Sermon Text for February 2, 2014***

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I Corinthians 1:25-31, I Samuel 17:1-11, 45-51

“Who wants the underdog?”

We had our last game of the season on Friday? It has been a great season, probably the first winning season for the Junior High Team at LMH in a decade. But Friday we played against Cocalico and when I walked into the gym I thought there was a mistake. Our tallest girls is about 5’7” and I counted at least 5 of their girls 5’9” or taller. They were all 9th grade girls and we have an even split between 7th and 8th graders. Our star player walked into the gym and quickly walked over to me and said with a very worried expression: “We play them?” Without a doubt we were the real underdogs if anyone had walked in to look at us on paper. But somehow we kept the game close and pulled it out in the end with a 4 point victory because the girls never allowed themselves to be intimidated and the other team might have been a bit overconfident when they looked at us.

I expected that this year for the Super Bowl there would be a clear favorite and a defined underdog. There really isn’t this year. But when you look at the Bible just about every event, every story, every situation you have a frontrunner, a clear favorite frontrunner, and an underdog, a clear underdog. Guess who normally wins in the Bible? The one who has all the odds against them, the one who is the least of these, the one who is never picked in kick ball or doesn’t play unless the team is way ahead or way behind. God seems to choose the least likely to succeed for his purposes.

Why, why does God make Gideon pear his army down to terrible odds against him? Why does God normally choose the youngest in the family, the lowest on the totem pole to lead their family to safety? Why does God keep a remnant against all odds to spring up and bring new life? It is all for the sake of the glory of God, that is why. Because when the underdog wins, God is glorified most clearly.

Today, both of our Scriptures deal with a circumstance where God takes something foolish and turn it to His glory for the simple reason of allowing his name to be glorified. We serve a God of the underdog, praise be to God. Let’s read.

In 1999 I traveled to Israel and we spent some time on our own in the valley of Elah where the Israelites encamped and the opposing Philistines were on the other side. There was a dried up stream there, or as the Bible states a wadi and there I picked up 5 smooth stones that I have to this day. 15 years ago these stones were chosen as a symbol of David overcoming Goliath. The next day we went to the Gaza border and I found this, a shell used in modern day to fight battles and I thought what a mismatch, especially when we see Palestinian boys using these trying to combat these and we wonder what are they thinking? It is foolish, it is folly to even attempt it.

This is the first time that I’ve preached on David and Goliath story, so I treasured the input from the men’s breakfast and someone said: I can’t imagine what David was feeling as he faced certain death with Goliath in front of him. We spoke of true heroes in our church who faced similar circumstances and the name of Paul Lefever came up as a David facing Goliath in his many missions, eventual capture, as a POW and then his release. How do we relate to the David’s facing the Goliath’s of today?

Let’s look at goliath and his description that we read in the first 11 verses. His stature is described as anywhere from 6’9” to 9 feet tall. The armor that he wore from a helmet, to a breastplate, to leggings made of metal, made him nothing less than a tank. His presence was so imposing, and he had the words to back it up as well, but he was so imposing that in vs. 11 it tells us that Saul the king and all the Israelites were both dismayed and afraid.

Who in their right mind would think they were a match for him? And then we get to David the ultimate underdog. The youngest of 8 sons who was forgotten while tending the sheep but chosen to be king not by how he looked, but by God’s knowledge of his heart. When he tried to put on king Saul’s armor he was swallowed up, couldn’t even carry his sword comfortably. He was not a soldier. He was an accomplished shepherd, which isn’t for wimps either, but he was no match for this soldier.

But in spite of how things looked, did you hear his words in vs. 45 and following. He approaches Goliath with a confidence that does not emanate from his abilities, his stature, his accomplishments. He approaches Goliath in the name of the Lord of hosts. David has no idea in this situation how God is going to bring a victory out of this situation, a situation that seems foolish and ridiculous to even think of it, but he was confident that it would happen.

What are the Goliaths in your life that when they loom up before you cause dismay and fear? Often our first reaction is to seek refuge and help in the armor of this world which only weighs us down and takes us even farther away from conquering the foe. The purpose of David’s battle was not so that Israel can win, was not to make a name for himself and his family, but was so that God’s name would be glorified in a powerful undeniable witness.

Over the years I have challenged you to face some pretty tall Goliaths. A few years ago I challenged you to tithe for the month of January, and you did, and some of you have told me how it worked. I have challenged you to pray for a miracle, a healing and you have, and it has worked, you have seen God reveal himself.

But the discovery of the efficacy of the tithe and the miracle is not ultimately for the purpose of putting our finances in order or for a person to have restored health. These are wonderful offshoots that we can celebrate. The purpose of the underdog winning is not in the victory, but rather the testimony, the witness to a loving and caring God that comes as a result of our being willing to be an underdog.

Look at I Corinthians, our first reading, and Paul addresses this very directly, I love the way he speaks to the Corinthian church members. Look at vs. 26, he says, you know that not many of you are really that smart, not too many of you are athletic or coordinated, not many of you are very successful, but hey, be glad, God chose you, First Presbyterian, the foolish of the world to confound the wise.

The Greek word for foolish, anyone know what it is? Moron, that’s right. So basically it would be as if Paul said: hey, God chose you, the morons of this world, to carry out His purposes. That’s a great mission statement: called to be Christ’s Morons. The point is that God wants us to be the underdog, the one who doesn’t have a chance, the one who steps out onto the court and looks at the opponent and says are we playing them? You expect me to go up against him? Because when you win, and you will win in your life when you are faced with that situation and God is on your side, guess who gets the credit for the victory? Not the moron, but Christ.

We miss that point at times. The reason for why God gives us opportunities and they are opportunities, to be the underdogs. Let’s look to the ultimate underdog. The one who from even before his birth had the odds against him. Jesus, born from a single mom, in a manger, a refugee before he was 5 and on the run for the first part of his life. A runaway at age 12, homeless at 30 and then arrested for sedition and put to death through capital punishment by the state. Our Jesus in every phase of his life was the ultimate underdog. God chose the foolish of this world, the boy shepherd, the poor, the orphan, the widow, to bring about his kingdom.

When they put that underdog in the grave, well, they had given up, and it was then and only then that God’s greatest act took place when Jesus, our Immanuel rose from the grave to conquer death so that we, his morons, would be able to live in his glory on this earth and eternally.

Look at your life and identify those who cross your path who are considered the least of these and how do we treat them? We want to jump up and say I’m the underdog, God loves me. That’s true, don’t ever forget it, but God call us to identify those that we have considered foolish, the least of these and see how God uses them for his kingdom. Amen.