

# Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

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Date: June 21, 2015  
Sermon Title: Why Youth Ministry?  
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe  
Scripture: 1 Samuel 17:32-40

## 1 Samuel 17:32-40

*David said to Saul, 'Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.' Saul said to David, 'You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth.' But David said to Saul, 'Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God.' David said, 'The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.' So Saul said to David, 'Go, and may the Lord be with you!'*

*Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul's sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, 'I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them.' So David removed them. Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.*

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I remember three phone calls in the days after September 11<sup>th</sup>. The first was from a couple scheduled to be married the next week. Should they postpone? The second was from a mom whose baby was going to be baptized the next Sunday. Should they reschedule? The third was from the parents of a high school soccer player at Fairfield High. They were about to restart the season. They had a game the next day. Should they play?

To all three families we had the same energetic answer: Yes, yes, yes! By all means, yes! Yes to the wedding; yes, have the baptism; yes, play soccer.

The world is hurting. People are afraid. We are in sorrow. So we need evidence of life, of joy, of fun. Evidence of birth and youth and marriage, and even sports. Evidence that life wins, love wins. Not the terrorist of any color, any ideology.

This week, a young boy walked into Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and after explaining that the ills of the world are black people's fault and so "they had to go," he killed nine of them. The murderer, the racist/terrorist is 21 years old.

For me, what better day to honor our high school graduates? What better day to baptize a baby? What better day to dedicate our ASP mission team? What better day to hear Niles on the cello? What better day for strawberry shortcake after worship?

What better day to blot out the evil with all the love and life of our young people and our church? Yes, we are horrified. Yes, we are heartbroken. Yes, we are grieving and shaken and angry. But we are not stopped. We are not hopeless. We are not giving up.

The Bible story you just heard is one of the classics. David and Goliath, good vs. evil, the underdog against the big dog. David was very much like our young people here today. He was brash, strong willed, louder than most adults like, knew more than his elders, annoyed his siblings. There was a war going, and the giant Goliath was the champion of the enemy. Every day he mocked the Israelites as weak and wimpy, too scared to fight. Every day he shouted out a challenge. Instead of the two armies fighting and killing each other, why not have Israel send out its best soldier, go up against Goliath, may the best man win, winner takes all?

The adults backed away. But teenager, adolescent, young adult David took the challenge. He agreed to go to battle against Goliath if he could do it his way. He went down into the valley, walked along a riverbed, picked up some stones, swung his slingshot from a safe distance, hit Goliath between the eyes, then cut off his head. "Winner takes all." "The best man did win." Well, actually, the best youth, the best teenager won.

Our world is full of Goliaths. Our church is full of Davids. There are plenty of giants to threaten us, frighten us. ISIS. Racism. The global economy. The pope just put climate change front and center on the world's stage. Religion is dwindling. The earth is warming. The jobs are moving away. There are more and more crazies with bigger and badder weapons. Putin is on the loose. China is building fortress islands in the Pacific. There is no water in California. And maybe no GE in Fairfield.

You're not safe in elementary school in Newtown. You're not safe in church in Charleston. You're not safe in a movie theater in Colorado. You're not safe in Boston during the marathon. You're not safe on an army post in Texas.

It can seem that way. We can think that way. We can live that way. Or, we can demand the better of ourselves. I'm choosing today to use our young people as an inspiration. The "Goliaths" are real. Our "Davids" are better.

With a tragedy like Charleston, the usual debates take place. The anti-gun people blame it on the guns. The pro-gun people want more guns. The airwaves are filled with people wanting to arm the churches; pastors call in to talk radio to boast of their gun power in the pulpit. They like to say things like, "I'm packin'." I'm thinking to myself, I can't even figure out how to use my iPhone, and people want to hand me an AK-47?

Well, that other David defeated Goliath. He used a weapon to do it. He used his wiles, his skills, his experience, his youth to outdo a greater enemy with a bigger weapon. But he gave the credit to God.

Our young people we honor today, our high school graduates and ASP team, our newly baptized little baby—all these are "Davids." They grow up in our church. They work in our church. They learn faith and practice faith and see faith in church. They're not intimidated by Goliaths.

I was invited to the Fairfield Ludlow High School graduation this week, and one of the speakers said, "There are two important days in your life: the day you are born and the day you find out why."

The joy of our youth ministry is that this is where our Davids "find out why."