I faced a giant once. I played one year of football in high school, which was about two years too many. I wasn’t built to play football; I was built to be the team manager. I ended up as a wide receiver because that was the position that was farthest from the ball and had the least amount of contact.

I always dreaded the drills we had to run in practice. My least favorite was the tackle drill. Two people stood about 20 yards apart. One person’s job was to take the football and run full-speed at the other person; that person’s job was not to die and to try and tackle the ball-carrier in the process.

One day when we were doing these drills, I realized that I was matched up against Tim Blankenship, who played middle linebacker. I think Tim was on steroids before it was popular to be on steroids. Although he and I were in the same grade, he was a head taller, about 40 pounds heavier, and he shaved three times a day. Plus, he was mean.

So there was Tim, about 20 yards away, football in his hand, smirk on his face, saliva drooling from his lips. And there was me, knees knocking together, trying to figure out how far I could run in the opposite direction before Tim caught me. The coach didn’t blow his whistle to start the drill; he played “Taps” on the bugle. The last thing I remember seeing was Tim barreling toward me, and then a bright white light with angels and harps. When I came to and sat up, I saw Tim sitting next to me – actually I saw about three or four of him sitting next to me. He looked at me and smiled and said, “Nice tackle.”

In our scripture today, King David also faced a giant, although I bet Goliath didn’t shave as much as Tim did. You may think you know this story, but it becomes even more amazing when you hear it in its context. As we heard last week, young David has been anointed as the next king, but the current king, Saul, is still ruling. Now settled in the Promised Land, Israel was constantly fighting off foes who wanted to invade and take their land from them. The most current challenger is the Philistines.

The two armies meet in the Valley of Elah with the Israelite army on one hill and the Philistine army on the other. As they are surveying each other, out of the Philistine camp steps Goliath, who is described in terrifying detail. He was over nine feet tall, he wore armor that weighed almost 200 pounds, and he had a shield so big that it took a full-grown man just to carry it for him.

He steps into the valley and begins taunting the Israelites. “Send me one person to fight. If they win, we surrender. But if I win, you surrender. Today, I defy the ranks of Israel.” It’s biblical trash talk! I’m sure there were a few “nanny-nanny-boo-boos” thrown in there. Verse 11 tells us that when Saul and all the Israelites heard these words, they were dismayed and greatly afraid. This went on twice a day for forty days: Goliath would issue the challenge, and no one from Israel would be brave enough to answer.

David’s three oldest brothers were in the army, but David was stuck at home tending the sheep. One day, his father tells David to take a bunch of supplies to his brothers on the front line. While he was there, he saw Goliath and heard the challenge being issued. And then, he saw the whole Israelite army run away in fear.
David says, “What’s the deal? You’re going to let a Philistine defy the armies of the living God?” And the Israelites say, “Have you SEEN this guy? King Saul is offering a huge reward for whoever kills him: the king’s blessing, the king’s daughter, and no taxes for the rest of his life.” I’m not interested in the first two, but that last one would have been pretty enticing. David doesn’t get their fear. The soldiers had looked at Goliath and said, “He’s so big, how can I win?” David looked at him and said, “He’s so big, how can I miss?”

David’s challenge to the Israelite army gets back to King Saul, who calls for David, which sets up this interesting conversation. David, God’s anointed king, tells Saul, the king God has rejected, “I’ll do it.” Saul says, “You’re kidding, right? Have you SEEN this guy? You’re just a kid.” David responds, “As a shepherd, I’ve killed both lions and bears to protect my sheep.” Verse 37 says, “The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.” So Saul says, “Go, and may the Lord be with you,” which is the Israeli way of saying, “We’re all behind you. WAY behind you.”

Before David goes, Saul tried to give David his kingly armor to wear. But Saul was a 52 long and David was a 36 regular and the armor didn’t fit. Rather than trying to be someone else, David is fine just being David. If he’s going to trust in God, he’s going to fully trust in God, not hedge his bets by making sure all the bases are covered. “Yes, God will protect me, but just in case God forgets, let me put on this chain-mail armor.” So he grabbed five smooth stones from the local creek and headed out to the battleground.

So we come to the climactic battle scene. When David stepped into the valley, Goliath takes one look down and snorts, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” and curses David. And David steps up to respond. You can just hear the orchestral music building in the background as he gives this stirring speech: “You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the L ORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This very day the L ORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the L ORD does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the L ORD’s and he will give you into our hand.”

Yes! If I were in the Israeliite army, I would be pumping my first and cheering for this little shepherd boy. And if I were Goliath, I’d probably be wondering if I picked a fight with the wrong kid. David then ran toward the big bully, took out a stone, slung it, and struck Goliath right between the eyes. The stone sank into his forehead and he fell face down on the ground.

The giant has been killed.

Was David scared as he walked onto that battlefield? I would think so. Despite his supreme confidence in God, Goliath was still a giant and David was still human. But David’s real battle wasn’t against Goliath; it was against his own fears. Would he be ruled by his fears or by his faith? What rules us?

We also face giants in our lives today, forces that threaten to take over our lives and hold us captive. The reality of life is that we have to face these giants: a diagnosis we’ve received; the fear of getting older; regrets that keep us stuck in the past; problems that keep us fearful of the unknown future; a sin we can’t seem to conquer; a worry we can’t seem to shake. We all have giants in our lives whom we’re afraid to confront.

David shows us how we can face our own giants. He wasn’t intimidated by the size of his opponent. Sometimes our giants can loom ten times larger than they really are, making us think we don’t have the size or strength to fight them. That disease is too deadly, the addiction has too
tight a stranglehold on us. But as we were told last week, God doesn’t judge us by our physical characteristics but by our character. So we are called not to be fooled by appearances. Like the saying goes, “Don’t tell God how big your giant is; tell the giant how big your God is.”

Something else David did was he ignored the advice of others. Very well-intentioned people will try to make you feel better by explaining away your giant. “Don’t worry, that surgery is no big deal.” “You just need to move on and leave that person.” But no one else can fight for you. Your Goliath is YOUR Goliath. Someone else might say, “Ah, that’s no big deal.” But to you, it’s Goliath. And no one else can battle him for you, not a counselor or a pastor, not a parent or a friend.

Saul tried to make David into someone else by putting armor on him. But we are not someone else. We are us, the person God created us to be, the person God wants to use to defeat those giants. When we are true to ourselves, we remember that we are not alone. “The battle is the Lord’s,” David said. We believe in a God who’s not intimidated by swords and coats of armor and bombastic speech. We believe in a God who’s not intimidated by tumors and hateful words and the power of sin. Our God is the true giant in this story and in our lives. We don’t have to be eloquent or strong or handsome. We don’t have to be beautiful or brilliant or have all the answers. God honors our faith. All God asks is we trust, that we stand before our giants with integrity and faith and call on God’s name.

To be fair, not all battles end in a rousing victory like David’s. Tim Blankenship definitely got the better of me in our collision. I wasn’t the winner. But I’m still here. There will always be giants for us to battle, but there will also always be God, standing beside us, ready to fight for us. Don’t let your giant problems of today eclipse the promises of a God who is, and was, and will always be. The battle is the Lord’s.