

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Good morning.

Congregation:

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The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Welcome to our daily worship of morning prayers here in Appleton Chapel. We're so grateful that you have joined us this morning. Our speaker this morning is Professor Ruth Okediji, Jeremiah Smith Jr. Professor of Law at the Harvard Law School. Thank you for being with us this morning. All who are able, please rise in body and spirit for our responsive reading found in your Black Psalter, Psalm 117.

Praise the Lord, all Nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is His steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord! You may be seated.

Choir:

Halle, Hallelujah, Halle, Hallelujah, Halle, Hallelujah, Hallelujah.

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Ruth Okediji:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Ruth Okediji:

I want to share a few things with you this morning, and the title of my brief remarks is Choose Your Stones. I'm reading from First John chapter four, verse 16, and we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, whoever abides in love, abides in God and God in him. In the book of First Samuel chapter 17, the Bible tells us about a young shepherd boy whose name is David. David is the ignored and overlooked sibling, the youngest in a somewhat dysfunctional family with a few temperamental issues of his own. As a shepherd, he spent his days with sheep, those smelly, stubborn, slow moving animals. It's not exactly a resume building experience. It's not a fancy job title. One day David is asked by his father Jesse to run a pretty simple errand to take cheese and bread to his brothers who were in a battle against a giant.

You see, for 40 days and 40 nights, a seasoned and skilled experienced army cowered before a pretty terrifying giant. Saul, Israel's King, had been asking for anyone, someone to step up and to face this giant and no one would. How was it that a people who had been delivered from slavery and from oppression, who had seen a Red Sea part, who had been through a wilderness and experienced miracles of manna and bitter waters becoming sweet, how was it that such a people could cower before this giant? How was it that this giant seemed impossible to overcome? You see, the Goliath's size was not really the issue. It was that every person who looked at Goliath compared themselves to him. He was big, they were small, he was powerful, they were weak. He had a huge armor. Their weapons were weak in comparison. And isn't that so true of us today that we see ourselves in the light of others?

By definition, a giant seems bigger than you, seems stronger than you, sometimes might even seem smarter than you. It might be a situation that you've never confronted before, a relationship that's caused you great pain, a job that you thought you had only to have it given to someone else. Giants taunt us. They remind us of our weaknesses and of our limits. They mock us in an effort to get us to do things in our own wisdom and in our own strength, while at the same time telling us that they are bigger and better and stronger. But here, dear friends, is the truth. Goliath was not a giant because of what he had or because of what he was. Goliath was a giant because of what each person who faced him did not have. When David said that he would take on Goliath, the army and the king, even his own brothers were irritated and incredulous.

They questioned his ability, they questioned his motives, they questioned his integrity, they questioned his intellect, "Are you sure you can?" "Are you sure you should?" "Who do you think you are?" The mocking that they had endured from Goliath for those 40 days and 40 nights was then deployed by that same army against David. You see the voice of giants that other people face can sometimes be the voice with which they turn around to speak to you and to me. But David did not see the giant. His vision was God-filled, and neither the mocking voice of his own family nor the mocking voice of Goliath could change what he knew to be true. David's true resume was not just tending sheep. It was experiencing God's love, God's strength, God's power in that work and that experience of God's love transformed David. David was not a shepherd.

He was rather a king in shepherd's clothing. What he was was not what he did or what he wore. And so the Bible tells us that David chose five smooth stones and put them in a pouch. Now, why five stones? Why not 10 or 15? This was after all a giant. One might even imagine a boulder. Let me suggest a few reasons and some lessons that we can learn from David about choosing our stones to face our giants. First, David did not take more than he could carry. A boulder may have seemed big and effective against the giant, but David could not have carried a boulder alone, and this was a battle he had to face. Second, David needed to carry something that could fit in his carriage thing of choice. His leather pouch was small and it was light. He took enough rocks to fill it, no more.

And third, David chose five stones, not more so that he would not be weighed down. Too often we are fighting giants, weighed down by the very weapons we think will defeat them, only to find them defeating us. Too many stones and David would've moved much more slowly with far less agility. So what are your stones? What will you choose? Let me challenge us with a few candidates that I've experienced in my own life that have helped me face and defeat giants. Faith, hope, kindness, patience, forgiveness. You see, we must choose these things and not the others, not the boulders that seemed bigger. In the end, David needed only one stone. He took it out with his sling and he hit Goliath squarely in the head, and down went this giant that seemed impossible to defeat. What was David's stone? I believe it was God's love.

In the book of First John, we read that God is love. Love is not just something he does. He is love. And we know from First Corinthians [inaudible 00:14:02] that love never fails. No giant can withstand God's

love for you and for me. And David, in tending those smelly, difficult sheep had encountered and experienced that profound love. Every other stone, just as smooth, is related to that love, and it was an expression of it, faith and hope and kindness and patience. And so I choose my stones and I encourage you to choose yours. Make sure that they can fit in the pouch of your heart. Make sure that they will not weigh you down. And remember that the mocking that you hear is never God. With a vision filled with God's love, you can sling your stone and see the giants fall. Let us pray.

Father God, I thank you for your people and I thank you for this community. We thank you for President Garber, for Provost Manning, for every dean of every school, for every faculty member and every student. Lord, I pray the eyes of our understanding would be flooded with light, that we would know the hope to which you call us, that we would have a renewed vision of your great love for us in Christ. That Father, we would walk with this love filling our hearts and that Father, in every situation that we encounter, in everything that we experience, that the knowledge of your love and the reality of it would transform us. Whatever we think we are, we would know for all time, moment by moment that we are chosen by you, that we are loved by you, and the greater are you that is in us than any giant that is in the world. We pray this in Jesus' mighty name. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Please rise in body and spirit and let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples saying,

Congregation:

"Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever, Amen."

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Now let us sing the closing hymn, hymn number 208, Eternal Light, Shine in My Heart, found in your Harvard [inaudible 00:17:03] hymnal.

Congregation:

Eternal light, shine in my heart; Eternal hope, lift up my eyes; Eternal power, be my support; Eternal wisdom, make me wise.

Eternal life, raise me from death; Eternal brightness, make me see; Eternal Spirit, give me breath; Eternal Savior, come to me.

Until by your most costly grace, invited by your holy word, at last I come before your face, to know you, my eternal God.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

As we leave this place, but never away from God's presence, may you choose your stones. May you have a vision of God's love, and may you tackle the giants in this world. Let us bless the Lord.

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Congregation:

Amen. Thanks be to God.