“Facing the Climate Giant”

September 21, 2025

# I Samuel 17:1*a*, 4-11, 32-45, 48-49

The annual Iowa City Climate Fest began on Friday. This series of free, family-friendly events celebrate the many ways our community takes action to address climate change. There were activities on Friday and Saturday and events will continue tomorrow through Thursday.

I noticed that our city has scheduled nothing for today, so I decided to take matters into my own hands.

I asked our friend, Robert Traer, who has worked extensively on the issue of climate change, to lead this morning’s adult education session. And our hymns and prayers this morning lift up this issue.

At various times over the years, I’ve preached about the care of Creation and the threats we are bringing to ourselves and our planet. But not recently.

In part this is because there have been so many other pressing issues. And in part because climate change is just a giant, intractable issue that looms over our lives and won’t go away.

Of course, my lack of preaching is only a very small part of the problem. Just this past week there was an article in *The New York Times* that announced: “It Isn’t Just the U.S. The Whole World Has Soured on Climate Politics.” It asked: “How do we think about the climate future, now that the era marked by the Paris Agreement has so utterly disappeared?” Around the world, people just don’t want to think about it.

As I said last Sunday, I *have* been thinking a lot about giants lately. And whether we *want* to think about it or not, climate change may be the greatest of all the giants.

Fortunately, the Bible helps me—and us—in our thinking. We heard one story about giants last Sunday. And this morning we heard that iconic biblical story about giants—David and Goliath.

This story has long been part of popular imagination. Many of us have known this story since childhood—although on hearing it again, we might wonder: what kind of story is this for children? It is a violent story—not for children, really.

Yet surprisingly, it offers us a way forward when we face giant, intractable issues—even when we face the climate giant.

Look.

David, with his shepherd’s staff in hand kneels down beside the dry stream-bed.

 He chooses five smooth stones.

He puts the stones in his shepherd’s bag and heads out to meet the champion of the Philistines.

Five smooth stones will be enough.

Five stones will be enough to face an enemy of gigantic proportions.

If we were to choose five stones to face the giant of climate change, what might they be?

Let me suggest faith, delight, truth, speech, and action.

Faith is the first stone.

We dare to go up against the giant of climate change because our faith compels us.

By faith we affirm that all human beings are created in the image of God and that our common calling includes the care of this planet. We are indeed stewards of the earth, entrusted with this singular and now threatened gift.

The simple religious practices by which we express our faith—worship, prayer, giving, hospitality, service—are ways that we reconnect with each other and with our neighbors. In this hour we remember the common bonds of our humanity, we remember our common calling so that we are equipped for the rest of our days.

Our faith can help make us just and peaceful in a time of uncertainty. Our faith can help make us open and humane in a time of fear. Our faith can help us establish communities of equality and respect in a time of change.

Knowing the answer, David asks of others, “Is there a living God in Israel? Is there a God who can ‘give life and give death?’” Is there a power that relativizes the fear and the danger noticed at first glance?

By his bold questioning, David introduces a new character into this story—the “living God.”

If God is irrelevant in the face of the Philistines, then all is lost for the Israelites. For David, however, it is unthinkable to assess a battle or anything else apart from the living God.

The question for us today is similar. The question for us is not simply “Is there a God?” But more to the point—“Does it matter?” If God is irrelevant, then all is lost.

Faith invites us to look closely at our fears—to look at those that are imaginary as we as those that are well founded. In faith, we take our fear into ourselves and find that both we and our fear are transformed. The outward result we call “courage”—and it springs from an inward struggle.

In this faith, let us pick up and consider a second stone: delight.

I know that for Congregationalists it is somewhat disconcerting to hear “delight” follow so quickly after “faith.” How often have I told you something along the lines of “Faith leads us to action.” It’s almost the UCC creed. Let’s do something!

Before we act, let us find the strength that grows from delight in creation.

In these days of great uncertainty and great adversity, when God often seems silent or absent, God is still at work in the world and in our lives. Faith in the God revealed through Jesus Christ leads us to hope and to act for the good in all the adversity of life.

Take a few minutes today—and if you can, take a few minutes *each* day to rest, to rest in the care, the love, and the strength of God.

You can do that.

You can do that for a few minutes.

In that rest, experience once more the goodness of creation, the beauty of this earth and your life on it.

Look and listen. Touch and smell and taste. That is, open yourself to the wonder of God’s creation. Only as we do this will we will be ready to once again take on our God-given role of stewards of creation, caretakers of the earth, our home.

And out of this strength, may we find new ways to care for creation.

Faith. Delight.

Look. Now we see a third stone: Truth.

We have to look closely and carefully, because truth is increasingly hard to come by.

In July, the Department of Energy released a report that contains several false or misleading claims about human-caused climate change, including that threats from rising sea levels and extreme weather have been overstated.

In August, Department of Energy Secretary Chris Wright said that previously published National Climate Assessments were not “fair” and that they will be “updated.” Experts have expressed concern that the unspecified updates will be used to undermine the scientific consensus on climate change.[[1]](#endnote-1)

The National Park Service has removed signs at Acadia National Park in Maine that make reference to climate change amid the Trump administration’s wider effort to remove information that it says undermines “the remarkable achievements of the United States.”

Rep. Chellie Pingree (D-Maine) said that signs removed from Acadia referenced the role of climate change in the extreme weather that has caused millions of dollars in damage to the park. Those impacts include sea-level rise, storm surges, and extreme rains, she said. Signage suggesting visitors take a shuttle bus to minimize their carbon footprint was also taken down, according to Pingree.[[2]](#endnote-2)

For now, we have information on how you can minimize your carbon footprint posted in Rockwood Hall. For now.

Remember David, looking for information: “What is to be done for the man who kills this Philistine and wipes out his disgrace?” he asks. “And who is this Philistine to defy the armies of the living God?”
Keep asking questions. Keep seeking the truth. Keep *telling* the truth even as that becomes more dangerous. And, friends, it is becoming dangerous.

Pick up the stone of truth.

And with it, the stone of speech.

I used to preach about climate change and the care of creation with some frequency. At some point, I thought I had said enough. I was preaching to the choir. (You know, of course, that’s just a metaphor—these people can always use another sermon.)

While I was silent, the whole world was moving on from climate politics and our own government was taking down websites and engaging in climate denial. While everything seemed to change, the science didn’t. As one person said, the science continued to generate grim warnings about the speed and consequences of temperature rise even as the fever of climate panic appeared to subside.

These are not easy times to speak the truth. Which, of course, is why we must find ways and times to do this all the more.

Once again, we in the liberal church are called to important work. While we used to be able to assume that many outside the church held our values and expectations, we are now called to define and clarify what those values are and learn to speak about them in ways that can persuade others. This is not about moral superiority. It is about creating a society that honors each of its members, a society that speaks the truth, a society that seeks the peace that grows from justice.

It is easy—it is quite easy to stand in a pulpit and speak truth that will never be heard by politicians. It is quite easy to stand in Rockwood Hall with a cup of coffee and speak truth that the power elites of our nation will not hear.

The more difficult task is to speak truth that will be heard by our neighbors, so that they will join us in calling for those who exercise authority to face the climate giant with us.

The more difficult task is to find effective ways to speak truth that will be heard by those in government and industry, whose actions affect the lives of millions, who hold the fate of our planet in the balance.

Remember, however, that these more difficult tasks are not impossible.

And there is that final stone: Action.

Oh, but what can we do?

Some things are individual, yes: Look at your money and your investments and use their power. Reduce your carbon footprint. Use sustainable energy—solar, the dreaded wind turbine. And vote—each and every time.

But we are not going to confront this giant simply by riding bicycles. We can’t recycle our way out of threat that we have created.

Use the power that you have and join with others to increase that power. Continue to put pressure on businesses and our elected officials. Find new ways of acting.

This includes repentance, that great religious word for turning in a new direction. Because climate change doesn’t care. It doesn’t care how bad people are our how righteous they are. It will keep increasing, keep wreaking havoc on our world as long as we retain what we are doing—as long as we keep holding close the deadly ways that we have long embraced.

Jesus told his followers I send you out in the world like sheep among wolves. Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Let that charge guide our action.

Five smooth stones Faith, Delight, Truth, Speech, Action.

Five smooth stones will be enough to go up against the giant.

Perhaps you will look around and find five different stones—or three, or even one.

And here’s the thing. Of the five stones David picked up, he only used one.

Maybe that’s all that is needed. Your faith or the delight of your neighbor might make the difference. Those who reveal the truth, those who speak boldly, or those who act bravely may yet be the ones to see the giant fall.

No one can do everything—but everyone can do something.

One stone.

The resources are at hand for us to use.

Five smooth stones—and the living God—will be enough.

Let us pray: God our strength and our shield, storms rage about us and cause us to be afraid. The sin that clings so closely looms large in our lives and in our nation. Save us from despair, deliver your children from fear, and keep us in your care now and forever. Amen.

1. <https://climate.law.columbia.edu/Silencing-Science-Tracker> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2025/09/20/national-parks-climate-change-slavery-purge/> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)