

It is Not What You Know, But Who You Know

1 Samuel 17:32-49; Mark 4:35-41

It has been said that: "If the essence of fear is trying to control, the essence of faith is letting go."

In a way, it would seem that every sermon is about faith and courage and that we ought to have it and use it. Such is the case today, with a sermon based on two familiar stories.

You have the story of young David for starters. His victory over Goliath is familiar.

The other story is of the disciples of Jesus, tossed about on the Sea of Galilee.

They seem so different, but maybe not so much.

Let's start with the boat, and the disciple's faith...or apparent lack of it.

In the midst of the storm, they are distressed not only of the wind and waves, but also distressed that Jesus doesn't seem to care. "Do you not care that we are perishing?" He is asleep, and usually that is either an indication of confidence, or indifference. The disciples assume the latter. They are not asking for a miracle, just a helping hand, or at least some empathy.

At this point they are doing the bailing, and trusting in their own efforts to keep from being swamped in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. But they are not confident that they can win, for they assume that they will perish.

Maybe they need to have more faith in themselves. Don't give up...just hang in there. People can do all things, if they just put their minds to it. The power of positive thinking, and similar approaches. "Trust your feelings Luke." The power to conquer the storms ahead is within you.

But that can-do attitude is not in evidence here, is it? In fact, after He takes care of the storm, Jesus refers to them as having no faith, or at least "little" faith in similar accounts. Apparently, that is the problem: a lack of faith in themselves, or they would have let Jesus sleep.

That is the disciples' reaction to adversity. They resign themselves to their perceived fate.

In the other story, the response to adversity could not be more different.

David doesn't whine. David says to Goliath: "Bring it big boy."

For where the disciples only see their demise, David sees an opportunity for glory and a witness for the power of the Almighty. Apparently, David had a lot of faith in himself. He didn't need any of those weapons that didn't fit. He couldn't use them anyway. Just let him use his trusty slingshot. He can handle this.

So, it would seem that the big difference between the two stories is that the disciples have little, or no faith, and David has it coming out in bunches. So it becomes a matter of how much faith the respective characters in the stories have. And you don't need much faith to be effective, for it is Jesus Himself who will note that if one only has faith the size of a mustard seed, which is minute, than you can move mountains.

So these stories illustrate the need for a lot of faith in one's self.

Or do they? Let's look again.

Start with David.

Pay attention to his trash talk with Goliath. The words are not about his own strength. It is about God who will give the victory. The challenges that he hurls at the Philistine say nothing about the weapons that he has, but rather about what God will do through his actions in the next few minutes. So David's faith is not in himself, but in the Lord God of Israel. And that's what wins the battle. That faith in God is the source of his confidence.

Bullies don't bother him. In fact, the text notes that he strides towards the battle. He is used to putting his trust in God.

Where is the disciples' faith?

It should be in Jesus...by now.

Listen again to Jesus question after calming the storm. "Do you *still* have no faith?" Hadn't the disciples not been paying attention to the kind of miraculous things that Jesus had been doing? Hadn't they figured out that God would take care of His own, one way or another?

John Calvin notes: "They that sail with Christ, although he seems to sleep ever so soundly when they are in danger, yet they are preserved by him in due time, being awakened."¹

This past week, our PCUSA 223rd General Assembly honored the memory of the Rev. Benjamin Weir, a past Moderator of the General Assembly, (1986). Weir and his wife, Carol, who died in 2010, were Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) mission co-workers in Lebanon from 1953 to 1985. Ben Weir was kidnapped on the streets of Beirut in 1984 by a faction in Lebanon's civil war and was held captive for 16 months...After returning to the United States, the Weirs taught...at San Francisco Theological Seminary until their retirement in 1995. "Ben oriented his life toward the relentless and often risky struggle for justice," said Debra Avery, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Oakland, Calif., where Weir worshiped...Avery said that a "leader of Lebanon's oppressed Shiite Muslim community" approached Weir in 1975 [before his kidnapping] as unrest in Lebanon began to worsen. The leader, she said, told Weir "my people are in trouble" and asked for his help. "Ben wrote that it was in moments like this that faith lets you know that you can't stand back and say, 'I'm not here,' hoping that the trouble will go away," she said.²

One commentator has noted that: The great threat to Christian faith is not that we will not be safe from the world's dangers but that we will be held captive by our fear of them - that we will have more faith in our fear than we have in Christ. ³

For there are storms. There are Goliaths. There are bullies. And we find ourselves in the middle of them. And to best them takes faith...so the question will be faith in whom?

The psalmist answers it pretty well:

I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he

¹ J. Calvin, Geneva Notes

² PCUSA *General Assembly News*, 6/21/18

³ Emily C. Heath, Christian Century, June 20 p.10

who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore.⁴

And you don't have to wake Him up.
God is at work.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost / MorningStar Presbyterian Church

⁴ Psalm 121 NRSV