

## The Rocks of Life

Scripture I Samuel 17: 32-49; Mark 4:35-41

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

How long has it been since you read the story of David and Goliath? Probably a while. You remember it now. Goliath was a Philistine -- an enemy of the Israelites. He was TALL. Most commentaries say 6'9" (4 cubits and a span) or 9'9" (6 cubits and a span). He is a professional soldier -- all decked out in the latest bronze armor and a first class javelin AND a sword. He was strong. He wore a bronze helmet. His bronze armor weighed 125 pounds. He wore bronze shin plates (those are certainly heavier than your soccer shin guards) and held a bronze sword. His spear had an iron head that weighed 15 pounds. For comparison, Olympic athletes use a javelin (a spear) that weighs about 1.5 pounds. And he had an ego that matched his size and strength.

The Israelites were justifiably afraid of him. Everyone, that is, except for one person. David -- a shepherd.. the youngest son. He doesn't have the latest in weaponry -- some would say he had no weapons at all. But he had faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Saul, the king of Israel, does offer his armor as protection and David puts it on. The image that comes to mind is that of a young boy wearing his father's shoes, shirt, and tie! Think about that for a moment. It's cute and comical, not brave and strong. He can barely move in this stuff. So he takes it off. And he takes up the weapons he uses daily -- his staff (a large pole with a curve on the end -- you know... that the shepherds carry in the Christmas plays) and his sling. He goes to the stream and picks out 5 smooth rocks. He is ready to defend God's honor. Now this sling is not like a slingshot or a child's toy, but is used to hurl rocks at great speed to kill an approaching predator (like a lion or bear). One of the commentaries says this sling is roughly equal to a .45 caliber handgun. Goliath is killed; the Philistines flee; God's honor and reputation are upheld.

The gospel passage strikes a different tone. It's early in Jesus' ministry. He has called the 12 and begun his teachings. He has just shared the parable of the sower (seed falling on different soils) and of the mustard seed. It's been a full day but Jesus wants to go to the other side of the lake. Do you know what's on the other

side of the Sea of Galilee? Syria! Not exactly the prime vacation spot for the Jews. But Jesus knew he had work to do. So late afternoon/early evening they get into the boat to cross the sea. As often happens, a big storm blew up quickly and threatens to capsize the boat, drowning everyone on board. In complete fear and panic the disciples look for Jesus and find him sound asleep. Asleep! We are perishing here Jesus – can't you at least stay awake and help us bail? (Hmmm... sounds like something Jesus says to them at the end of his ministry!)

Have you ever felt like this? Have you ever felt like you were sinking in a raging sea, and no matter how hard you prayed, and how intently you looked for Jesus, Jesus just didn't seem to be listening?

Did you ever feel like you would hit the bottom of the sea before Jesus ever got around to doing anything about it?

Have you ever asked out loud: *Why? Why me? What did I do to deserve this? O God, do you even care?*  
...Yeah, me too...

I think that this is Mark speaking directly to the Church, to the early church and to us: *There will be times when you feel like your boat is being swamped. And, when that happens, do not be afraid. Jesus does care. Jesus is there. Jesus will calm the storm.*

It can't be said enough: God never, ever, ever promises that nothing bad will ever happen. God never promises smooth sailing and blue skies every day. If you think that God promises this, you haven't read your Bible lately.

What God does promise is that when the world comes crashing down, God is right there with us. Jesus is there with us, in the sinking boat.

This is an important part of the story: Jesus isn't elsewhere. He isn't in some cushy palace somewhere eating olives and hummus.

He is **in the boat with the disciples**. Sinking.  
And then he calms the storm.

So, maybe the world is crashing in on you today. Maybe it was yesterday. And then again, maybe it will be tomorrow.

But, whenever it does—and it's not a matter of "if", but "when"—whatever you think, and whatever your prayer, know that you haven't been abandoned. God isn't on a lunch break. God isn't out for you.

God is with you. And all you need is enough faith to get you through to the moment when Jesus speaks, "Peace. Be still."

When it comes to our faith, I think we too have the choice of whether we will live in fear or in trust. That applies to all aspect of our lives, but especially to what we do at Church. It's my opinion (and not mine alone) that church growth is fairly simple. If you always do what you've always done, you always get what you've always gotten. It seems that many think that the way to promote the vitality of a church is to take old familiar ways and just push them harder. But that reminds me of the definition of insanity—doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result! I think there are many well-meaning church leaders in our day who are doing all they can to validate that as the definition of insanity!

Seeking new vitality requires new directions—that's just as true for church as it is for life in general. And stepping out in new directions takes courage and faith. Unfortunately, many of us act as if we think that our living Lord Jesus the Christ is asleep somewhere in the back of the boat and all we can see are the waves crashing all around us. I think Jesus would ask us as well, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" (Mk. 4:40)

We don't know the outcome of the new directions for our congregation. We can work as hard as we possibly can and we still can't control the results. But what we do know is this: "those who know your name put their trust in you" (Ps. 9:10).

The story of the calming of the storm in Mark continues this theme. Jesus, the Son of God, is physically present in the boat with the disciples. Awakened by their terror, Jesus stills the chaos of the sea and rebukes them for their lack of faith. This shows Jesus cares deeply that we are perishing. God does not abandon the chosen people. The timing of salvation is unknown to us, but its coming is certain. God is the protagonist, not us.

But we do have tools at our disposal as we seek to be faithful servants of God, commending ourselves to holy service: five smooth stones, weapons of righteousness, the presence, power and promises of the Triune God. No matter the raging storms, the persistent evil, the Goliath-sized threats, we are assured that our

faith is not in vain, our courage not foolhardy, because while it may appear we have nothing, we possess everything.

Our God-given gifts, our five smooth stones - whatever they are, God uses. Kindness, patience, knowledge, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, these weapons of righteousness are more than enough to fell the evil all around and within. The power of the One who is Lord of all, so powerful that even the seas and wind obey him, will not languish, asleep and uncaring, when we are in need. If we take to heart the power, presence and promises of the Most High God, why are we afraid?

But we are afraid aren't we? We, like the disciples in the boat, feel lost at sea, blown by winds, overwhelmed by waves, unsure if Jesus, or anyone for that matter, notices or cares about our plight. How can we possibly be anything other than afraid?

That's the tension we live out every day. We know we aren't supposed to be afraid, and yet we are. The threat of nuclear war rises and falls with each news cycle. Our social media feeds reveal friends grieving unspeakable losses. Prayer concerns named at church lay open our physical finitude, our corporate sinfulness and our inability to do what is right or even know what is right.

What about you? The next time your life is rocked by a storm, don't stand there all alone, trying to be strong and steer your life against the storm. And don't run around in panic shouting at Jesus "Don't you even care?". Instead turn to our savior saying "I have a problem. What should I do?" and then WAIT for the answer.

To God be the Glory. Amen