

Pentecost IV: Fear and faith

1 Sam 17: 32-49 Psalm 9: 9-20 2 Cor 6: 1-13 **Mark 4 35-41**



The story is told of Chippie the parakeet who lost his song after his owner decided to clean his cage with the vacuum cleaner, only she looked away at the critical moment and sucked him into the dust bag. Rescued from there, she thrust him under the tap and then dried him with a hair dryer. Poor old Chippie, sucked in, washed up and blown over, no wonder he lost his voice!

I imagine very few of us could not describe some aspect of our lives where we feel – or have felt – a bit like Chippie, and like the disciples in that boat – vulnerable and afraid. You probably know what it's like to feel as though you are in the middle of a storm, tossed this way and that, and you wonder how you will ever get to dry land.

As experienced fishermen, the disciples probably know that there is a likelihood a storm will get up on the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps they also wonder why, instead of waiting until morning, Jesus seems to insist on getting into a boat to cross over that same evening, “just as he is” the text says, apparently without any preparation.

A “great” (*megas*) storm materialises and threatens to sink the boats. If these disciples who fish for a living think they are going to perish in the storm, we should trust their judgment. Nothing indicates that they overreact; this is no common storm.

The storm's ferocity, and then, what happens next, seem to take them by surprise.

Jesus doesn't calm the storm as much as he overpowers it and brings it to heel. When he rebukes (*epitimao*) the violent wind and demands that the chaotic waters be still (*phimoo*), it recalls his

doing the same when he cast unclean spirits out of a man in the Capernaum synagogue as the same verbs are used (Mark 1:25).

Repeatedly in Mark's gospel Jesus engineers endings that people are not expecting. Over and over, he thwarts outcomes that appear to be inescapable: The disciples believe they are about to drown, they never saw it coming, but neither do they expect the eventual outcome.

The OT lesson is a similar story about someone who is completely blindsided by events.



The story of David and Goliath has inspired many dramatic paintings:



Caravaggio to Gentileschi



Goliath, the champion Philistine fighter was reportedly 6 ft 9 in, this painting illustrates something of the size of the man and the scale of the fear he inspires in his foes:



The Israelites and Philistines are encamped on either side of the valley of Elah staring at one another. Neither side dares attack as

it means descending into the valley and climbing the opposite ridge: A suicide mission. To break the deadlock, the Philistines send their greatest warrior down into the valley for one-to-one combat.

Dressed in full body armour and a bronze helmet, Goliath carries a javelin, spear and a sword, while an attendant goes ahead of him bearing a large shield. He expects traditional "single combat", a warrior like himself to come forward for a hand-to-hand fight. In this kind of conventional, close combat, he is unbeatable.

David is dwarfed by Saul's armour so he goes into battle equipped with nothing but the tools of his trade: A staff, shepherd's bag, slingshot and five smooth stones.

Goliath does not get what he expects at all, but he perhaps should have known about it. Ancient armies consisted of three kinds of warriors: Mounted cavalry, infantry and projectile warriors, the early equivalent of artillery: Archers and slingers. An experienced slinger could reportedly kill or seriously injure a target from up to two hundred yards away.

Goliath is heavy infantry and expects a fight with another heavy infantryman. David is a slinger, and slingers always win over infantry. "Come to me" Goliath says, come and fight me hand to hand. David has no intention of honouring the ritual of single combat. As we know, he can kill Goliath without getting anywhere near him.



I puzzled over why these two stories feature together on one Sunday. They seem unrelated and are each worthy of a 45 min sermon *at least!*

Two themes seemed to stand out for me: Fear and faith.

Fear is the dominant emotion of the people around the main protagonists, Jesus and David.

The text tells us that neither the raging storm nor the yelling disciples disturb Jesus' peaceful rest. They have to wake him up. "Why are you afraid?" he asks.

No one in the Israelite camp is willing to take on Goliath for it will mean certain death. "Let no one's heart fail because of him;" David says, "Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."

Both David and Jesus are supremely calm and confident despite facing apparently certain death. They are sure of the God in whom they trust: "... the living God... the Lord ... will save me from the hand of this Philistine" is David's statement of **faith**.

Jesus questions his disciples is: "Have you still no faith?" It is still early in Jesus' ministry, but the disciples have been with him for a while, they have watched him preach, teach, heal, and cast out demons, but they still do not understand: "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Faced with the *megas* challenge of restoring this building I have felt Jesus' question is for me because I find it hard to imagine a solution: "Have you still no faith?" Perhaps that resonates with you too.

David's words feel like a salve for my worry: "... the living God... the Lord ... will save me..."

Perhaps that resonates with you too.

Resources

Sermons.com - Vince Gerhardy, *Calm in a Storm*
David and Goliath, Malcolm Gladwell, 2013, Allen Lane
Eating with the Bridegroom, John Shea, 2005, Liturgical Press
Blueletterbible.com: David Guzik
Workingpreacher.com: Matt Skinner