

Stories for Children
1 Samuel 17:32-49
Mark 4:35-41

The two stories that we have read today are among the more well-known in the Bible. I remember them from Sunday School as a child, and also Vacation Bible School. They are iconic in the sense that they plant themselves deep into not only the individual but also the cultural consciousness. They are, of course, the story of David and Goliath and the Stilling of the Storm.

Part of the reason for this familiarity is that they are among the stories we tell our children. The Bible has an adult message, but it also has stories for children. What makes the story about David compelling for children is that David himself was only a boy.

The Stilling of the Storm is compelling for children because it is picturesque, it involves a storm. What child has not been afraid of a storm, and calmed by the presence of an adult, or someone who was not afraid? One can easily relate to that feeling of fear even if, like me, one has no experience of it.

The great underdog story
Peace in the middle of storm

To be sure, we adapt these stories for children, but at their basic level, they are really adult stories.

War/Struggle

For instance, war. War is an adult thing. None of the issues are to be handled by children. Armies lined up against armies. The implications of battle, especially with ancient medical knowledge and techniques, are all very R-rated because of the violence.

And the challenge laid down by Goliath is formidable, it proposes to end the strife without a major bloodletting. The problem is, of course, that Goliath has no intention of losing and no one in Israel thought they could defeat the giant and the fate of the whole country resting on the outcome.

Serious business is involved. Character issues like faith and courage are involved. Leadership, which involves asking people to risk their lives, is needed; the appalling decision to allow a child to go fight an adult's battle.

To be sure, both of these stories are metaphors, life is a struggle, very often leaving a person feeling beat up, like they have been in a fight, often in a struggle against great odds. And certainly involving the same character issues.

David's faith and courage, and even defiance in the face of risk is commended to us as traits to nurture and as necessary to face life's precarious dangers.

Storms

It is the same with storms. Even today, the best advice is to steer clear of them if possible. When the sirens go off, people are cautioned to stay inside or go to their basements; by no means to head for the lake and get in a boat. Severe storms are well-known for leaving destruction in their wake, and death is not unheard of.

Life as a storm is an easy to grasp metaphor. One never knows what might happen. Even if precautions are taken one never knows when the winds will arise and make the calmest days dangerous:

The loss of a job

A health diagnosis, cancer or diabetes

Accidents

Addictions

The failure of relationships

My Own Case - Divorce

I myself have faced some storms in life, though I am aware of more critical situations. The greatest crisis involved the failure of a marriage and divorce. It involved rejection, separation, and financial strife. I have to admit that in addition to being very sad about it, and also afraid of what might happen next to me and my children, there were also times when I thought I was coming unglued, losing my mind.

But in the middle of it there was a certain peace that came. I learned to take things “one day at a time” as we say (one of the best cliches ever invented), to enjoy the little things, and to pay attention to all the ways of Providence, the way over time things were resolved and life got better in ways I was forced to conclude were miraculous. Like David I noticed the way my life had prepared me.

In times of crisis, one is forced into lifestyle habits that actually work well when there is no crisis; living one day at a time, enjoying the little things, paying attention to Providence. Additionally, I paid attention to the scriptures and they came alive to me in ways I had not previously noticed.

Because the scriptures were written by people in crisis, undergoing a greater crisis than I have ever experienced, a more difficult storm, they speak to us powerfully in our troubled times, and it was impressed on me to:

Take responsibility for my own sinfulness and spiritual health

To acknowledge my weakness

To be forgiving of others

To nurture compassion, to work at overcoming angered self-pity

To wait, learn patience

To trust

To pray

I experienced God's presence strongly enough that at certain moments it seemed overwhelming. Though I do not consider it an achievement, but a gift, I learned a stronger faith, and also gratitude and hope. There was peace in the storm.

Have You No Faith? Let No One Be Discouraged

Some interpreters of the bible have noticed that the stories told often involved short sayings, like cliches, one scholar called them, "pithy," which means concise, but forcefully expressive. Very often Jesus spoke this way:

"A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country,"

"The Sabbath was made for human beings, not human beings for the Sabbath."

"Let the dead bury their own dead."

"She who has been forgiven much, loves much."

"Those who are well have no need of a physician. The Son of Man came to heal the sick."

Sayings like that. Our stories for this day also have short sayings, and I will leave them with you; one comes from David the shepherd boy, and the other comes from Jesus, and I leave them both because

they sum up the meaning of these stories and serve as words of encouragement and challenge.

The first one comes from David when he approached King Saul and volunteered to do battle with Goliath, he simply said,

"Let no one lose heart. . ."

The second comes from Jesus when they awakened him in the storm and he had rebuked the wind and the waves, "Do you still have no faith?"

Whatever your circumstances or what are the world's circumstances, the message is the same,

Do not be discouraged!
Believe!

We tell these stories to our children, but they are adult stories. When you think of David, and Jesus in the boat when the winds come up, be reminded once again of this divine message.

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