

1 Samuel 17:32-49 Grown Up Stories
Mark 4:35-41
June 20, 2021

What wonderful stories we are blessed to have heard this morning, and to give our attention in these moments of worship. At the center of both of the readings today is faith in action, that is, an inner disposition of the heart that leads to a demonstration in life circumstances.

Both stories are, of course, familiar. David and Goliath is the pre-eminent underdog story. The Stilling of the storm one of the more familiar miracle accounts. By no means is the focus solely on triumphant faith, but failures as well.

The failure in the first case involved King Saul and the entire Israelite army. No one could be found to face the Philistine Goliath in singular combat. The failure in the second case was that among all the followers of Jesus, none could be found that were not rattled by the storm, shaken to their core, because of the danger at hand.

Both have captured the imagination not only of the believing community but also of the general public. They have become metaphors for life because they are easily relatable and offer lessons that can be applied over a wide range of experiences. They challenge us to examine our own faith.

Three years ago, when these texts came up in the lectionary, the title of the sermon was, "Stories for the Children." Today it is, "Grown Up Stories." I have always believed that though we teach these stories to children in Sunday School, they are not really children's stories. Rather, they are grown-up stories about life at its most mature stages, when the naivete of youth is gone and people are faced with stiff challenges before which there is an inevitable stumbling.

The story of David has problems: first of all, it presents God as a god of war leading troops into battle. There is a disconcerting aggressiveness, especially now that waging aggressive war has been declared a crime against humanity and the human capacity for destruction has become so great that it must be restrained and there is usually more harm than good in a war. Things have progressed to the point that there are no longer any problems people face, that can be solved by war.

That is in addition to the child abuse involved in this account, sending a boy to do a man's job, when any reasonable expectation is that he would be killed. Saul even said as much. Finally there is the graphic nature of it, Dave cutting off Goliath's head with his sword and presenting it to the king.

And yet it is a story we tell to our children to teach them to remain strong in faith even when the odds are stacked against them. I suppose most adults are in

need of such stories, to inspire them to faithful actions when the circumstances are against them like that.

There is a larger narrative built in to the David stories. Taking this one episode and letting it stand alone does damage to that larger picture. It is a story of David's rise to power and his subsequent fall from grace because he was corrupted by wealth and power, a vulnerability shared by all those who have tasted power's tempting snares. And yet he was redeemed.

We should be aware of the rest of the story as we enjoy being reminded of one the chief lessons of our Sunday School careers, and the encouragement it provided as we were trained in the faith. Keep in mind also as you read this story that in addition to the rise and fall of David the Judean King, we are also reading about the rise and fall of the larger Israelite civilization. It is the story of the human race.

The bible tells of David's triumph, not only as a boy but later as a king, not because of the glorious and miraculous way it began, but because of the tragic way it ended.

Part of what gives these stories lasting power is that the challenges they present are ever-present, repeating themselves generation after generation: failure in the face of difficult challenge, inadequate leadership, the aforementioned corruptions of wealth and power, and the immediate triumph of youthful exuberance and invincibility that only lasts for a short time.

Jesus runs across the same dynamics in his own life and ministry. The exuberance of Peter telling him he would follow wherever and then in one night denying him, failing to acknowledge even their acquaintance. Here, the failure of these who were raised on the sea and trained to make their living on it, now believing they are helpless against the storm.

The telling of these stories is meant to engage us in a wrestling match with our inner selves, the cowardly part of ourselves encountering the noble and courageous part, the unbelieving part encountering the faithful and loyal part. This engagement is intended to bring us to our knees in humble confession.

We are children still in a way, and we as grownups read them as if we are *still* children. They have power over us. Our prayer is that power would make us over, to turn us to be more, and it feels like an endless redundancy; kind and compassionate, more courageous and merciful, more generous and honest, more accepting of others, more loving.

It is the Spirit of God who works in us through these stories, and countless others, to shape our identity and our behavior, creating and nurturing that inner disposition of the heart we call faith, leading to sometimes miraculous accomplishments, helping us to grow up, and by God's grace also leading to the redemption of our lives, to the saving of our souls.

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