

Rev. Linda Suzanne C. Borgen, Rector.
St. Thomas Episcopal Church
Greenville, AL 36037
www.stthomasgreenville.org

Readings: 1 Samuel 17: 1a, 4-11, 19-23, 32-49, Psalm 9:9-20, 2 Corinthians 6:1-13, Mark 4:35-41

Both our Old Testament reading about David's confrontation with Goliath and our Gospel reading of the storm on the sea of Galilee give us an opportunity to reflect on what it means to have a strong and well-anchored faith.

David was just a boy when he faced Goliath, but he had already lived through many moments when he depended on the Lord to safeguard his life. In that moment when the Philistine giant stood hurling insults at Israel's warriors, David heard a challenge toward Israel's God, and he would have none of it.

This is one of the first encounters we have with David, and what it reveals is the condition of his heart toward God. David's concern was for the Lord first, and then for himself. And David's self-concern was always filtered through his high esteem of God's power and gracious love.

Even as a boy, the confidence David had in himself was a byproduct of his confidence in the Lord. David did not pretend to be skilled as a warrior. His faith was in the Lord, who had enabled him to protect his father's sheep and had preserved David's life as well. David had a servant's heart, and he had confidence in the Lord who cared for him.

First and foremost, David set his trust in God's concern for his well-being, and this trust anchored his faith. David told Saul, "The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17: 37). David believed not only that God could take care of him, but that God would take care of him and rescue him from harm.

Fast-forward to Jesus and his Apostles. Mark 1 says "after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'" This good news was the message of God's deep love for humanity and all He had created.

Before we reach the point where we enter their story today, Jesus had been healing people and teaching about God's love with an authority no one had ever heard before (Mark 1:27). Jesus cured people's diseases and cast out unclean spirits. He proclaimed the power of God's transformative love when he forgave people's sins and said, go and sin no more – continue living this life of grace God has given you as a gift.

Jesus' disciples were witnesses to all these things. They knew the measure of God's love and concern for all humanity from watching Jesus with the crowds. They had been there when a leper said to Jesus, "If you choose, you can make me clean." Mark wrote that Jesus was moved with pity for the man and he responded, "I do choose. Be made clean!" (Mark 1:40-41).

The Apostles had watched as Jesus extended grace to tax collectors and sinners, even calling one of them to join their group. They had listened as Jesus challenged the Pharisees about their hardness of heart and lack of compassion when he asked them whether it was lawful to do good or do harm on the sabbath, knowing that they would rather prevent him from healing someone and taking away their suffering, than have their authority challenged (Mark 3:1-5).

By the time the Apostles were in the midst of the storm, that moment when a great wind arose and the boat was being tossed in the waves and they were taking on water – by this time the Apostles knew Jesus cared about their lives, or they should have after all they had seen and heard.

But listen to the passage again. "They woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?'" When they finally called out to Jesus to intercede for their welfare, they questioned his concern for them. They could have cried out, Lord help us! They could have cried out, Lord save us! But instead, they questioned whether Jesus was really on their side at all asking him, "do you not care that we are perishing?" The storm was sudden, and though they knew these types of storms were not uncommon they were taken by surprise, and they roused Jesus not with a request of faith, but with a lament of doubt.

Did they truly think Jesus' didn't care about their well-being? Probably not. Should they have called to Jesus before their panic was this great? Probably, but scripture does say the storm came on suddenly; perhaps there was not time. Whatever the details were, their panic was enough to make them question not whether Jesus could help them, but whether he wanted to help them. They

questioned Jesus' compassion and in doing so they questioned the character of God.

There is a lesson here for all disciples of Jesus. Life's storms can come up quickly – there are times when feelings of fear and panic can be overwhelming, but these are the very moments when we must rely on our knowledge of God's goodness and what we know to be true about His love for us, rather than relying on our feelings to inform our hearts and minds.

What would it have looked like for the disciples with Jesus that night to have responded to the storm in faith? Maybe they would have called out to Jesus sooner, readily telling him they needed his help, rather than letting him sleep while they struggled. Instead of doubting because they had allowed themselves to be overcome by panic – perhaps faith would have led them to call out to Jesus as soon as the storm began, saying - Lord we know you can help us – please help us!

What does this kind of faith look like in the storms of our own lives? Unlike God's character, which is constant and unchanging, our own faith and doubt require constant tending to. Life can be full of sudden storms that come up in an instant and catch us off guard. If we have been in a season where we have been coasting along in our faith, we risk being unprepared for such challenges. There is no such thing as a faithful spiritual life set on autopilot. Daily spiritual practices that seemed sufficient in one moment can be completely inadequate for a season of unexpected challenge, but practicing disciplines of discipleship daily keeps us awake to God's love and anchored in our faith in Him.

When storms arise, we need to make sure that we are setting our confidence in our knowledge of God's character and on the measure of His love for us revealed in Christ. If we allow ourselves to focus on life's storms, our human frailty and vulnerability will cause us to be motivated by fear rather than faith, and doubt will find a foothold.

But if we intentionally keep our focus on the Cross of Christ, we are reassured not only by our knowledge of God's love for us, but by our understanding of the lengths He is willing to go to in order to save us. The Apostles would later come to have a faith like David's. They would develop servant hearts that were steadfast and faithful in holding to their confidence in God's love for them. Their courage and strength became anchored in their faith in God, and their witness changed the world. May we also strive toward this same measure of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.