

**Sermon, Father William J. Albinger**

**June 21, 2009**

**Proper 7B 2009**

In the Name of our One Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today's readings from the Hebrew Scriptures and the Gospel of Mark are about trusting in God - especially in hard times or difficult circumstances. The story of David and Goliath is probably the only one I remember vividly from when I was in Sunday school. It is a good story that is well told. The excitement and suspense increase as we approach the battle. While Americans are notorious for rooting for the underdog, young boys can really identify with young David. They know they are small and resent being told that. They have confidence and resent being ignored if not outright dismissed. They know they have competence and skills that go unrecognized or unappreciated. Young boys are small but they refuse to believe that they are weak or powerless. David's their hero.

What distinguishes the story is not only the disparity of apparent power between David and Goliath but David's total faith in the face of seemingly impossible odds that the God of Israel is with him and wishes him and his people well. Disdaining Saul's armor and going out armed only with his shepherd's slingshot, he examines the bullying, taunting Goliath to find a soft spot unprotected by his mighty armor and then, he takes his shot. Goliath topples forward and David then kills him with his sword and decapitates him. The Philistine army flees in fear and is followed and defeated by the Israelites. David has not only defeated Goliath but has won access to the sea for his people. Like Bill Gates, he has exponentially enlarged their world and increased their trading opportunities. A major historical shift has occurred – all from faith and a slingshot!

Aside from the lesson of David's trust in God there is another great Biblical lesson in this story – the foolishness of relying exclusively on the strength of arms and one's own power. President Eisenhower, who as a General led us in the most important battle in our history, warned us of this in his farewell address. For the most part, we haven't listened.

It is even more foolish to believe that because of our strength or resources we are thus on God's side. President Lincoln, who led our nation in a war where brother fought brother, warned us against this. In the Bible, this truth – that God cares about justice and is neutral about the parties - is applied as much to Israel as it is to Israel's foes. Every nation and every army has a chink in its armor. David, a shepherd boy, stood there studying Goliath as the giant taunted him. Sure enough, he found it! This seems to be true for people too. Our armor, our defenses alone are not enough to make us invincible. We have to have something more solid than that on the inside under our armor to survive: something that takes the strut out of our stride!

I am reminded of something I once read in one of Annie Lamont's books. It goes something like this: When you know that God approves of everything you like and disapproves of everything you don't like and is against everyone you disapprove of, you can be absolutely certain that you have created God in your own image and likeness.

In our Gospel lesson from Mark, we find Jesus and some disciples after a grueling day teaching large crowds beside the sea from a boat. He said to the disciples, "Let us go across to the other side." A very human Jesus, dog tired, then crawls up on a cushion in the stern and falls soundly asleep. A great windstorm blew up and the waves began beating against the boat and water poured in over the gunwales. Sinking seemed imminent and they awake Jesus and say, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Notice the words – we are perishing. They were certain doom was at hand. They had good reason to fear. The Sea of Galilee

is a shallow lake surrounded by very tall hills. When a good wind blows it can seemingly come from all directions at once whipping the water up into chaotic waves turning the lake into a boiling cauldron. They were clearly in danger.

It doesn't seem like they expected Jesus to be able to do anything about it. They didn't say, "Teacher, save us!" It seems that they woke him up so that he'd know that they were all going to drown! What a contrast the disciples are to David facing Goliath!

Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" The wind immediately ceased and the seas became dead calm. Looking at the disciples he sees that they are afraid and asks them, "Have you still no faith?" They are in awe wondering who are they with- this man who can command the wind and sea and they obey him. They are not just seeing something new. They are experiencing something beyond their comprehension.

A lot of preachers will be preaching on these texts today. It is easy to reduce these stories to an assurance that when God is with us nothing bad can ever happen to us. That might be OK to give assurance to a frightened child who has no control over his or her emotions; but we are adults and we know that it isn't true. To tell people otherwise does them a disservice. Bad things can and do happen to anyone. The sun shines and the rain falls on both the good and the bad. The preachers today will look out at a sea of listeners. In that sea they will see the chaos of our lives that threaten to drown us –war and violence, loss of a loved one, loss of a job, the emotional devastation of broken relationships, illness, addiction, fears about being alone or aging. The sea of our lives can indeed be chaotic and overwhelming.

I think these stories are not about the adequacy of our faith or the invincibility of God's chosen. I think they are more about God's presence with us in all circumstances. The real model for faith when in rough seas is Jesus. Jesus even early in his ministry had been creating controversy and angry opposition. The storm at sea in our reading is analogous to the hostility Jesus had been stirring up on land. Dog tired and with growing powerful opponents, what did

Jesus say? He didn't lay low. He said, "Come, let us go to the other side!" The other side is where the gentiles lived, where no pious Jew would think of going to further ruffle feather and threaten the safe assumptions of powerful people.

There is an African proverb: calm seas do not make for skillful sailors. Following without examination and thought the safe assumptions we have inherited is not faith! Stepping forward from group thinking when called for, speaking truth to power – this stepping out from the crowd to tell your truth is faith. Jesus saw the strength of God's caring love in the weak and rejected among him and he saw the weakness of self-anointed power and self-professed piety.

Like David he stepped out with all that he had – trust in God – not assuming that no harm would come to him but certain that God's righteousness would eventually prevail. Yes our boats get rocked and we may even sink, but God is there with us whatever is going on, inviting us, indeed urging us towards the Kingdom. "Come," Jesus says, "let us go on to the other side." Let us not be afraid to leave behind unexamined safe assumptions, let us be willing to enlarge our world. Let us go forward, trusting in God.

Amen.