

*Yes you can be like David*

by Roger Hungerford

Holy and gracious Lord grant us the courage to be instruments of your peace, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Today's Gospel and Old Testament readings are among the best known stories from the Bible. I am of the opinion that if you were to ask just about anyone walking the streets here in Hampton Roads to name famous stories that came from the Bible among them they would tell you about David and Goliath and Jesus calming the seas. These stories about events from the past have been used by a lot of people, especially parents, over and over as examples of courage and Jesus' calming power. Deep down inside we all want to be a hero like David. Culturally being a hero who sweeps in and saves the day is a common vehicle for movies and TV shows. Kids play games about being heroes. In one of Marguerite's sermons she told us about childhood adventures where she tied a towel around her neck as she imagined being a caped crusader defeating the villainy in her neighborhood. I could relate I did that too. When I was a child, Stanwood Iowa was one of the safest towns in the United States, because my brothers and I were vigilant 5-year-old caped crusaders. Desiring to be like David and defeat giants is ingrained in all of us.

It seems so appropriate that just before Liz and I head off to Austin and I start seminary that the readings should include these two lessons - especially David facing Goliath. In spite of the hero focus most of us get from the David and Goliath saga, it seems to me the central element in both the Old Testament and Gospel readings for today is fear, and this life transition Liz and I are undergoing is brimming with fear. But the energy and enthusiasm associated with my calling masked my fears. Leaving Emmanuel really didn't get disconcerting for me until Wednesday May 27<sup>th</sup>. That was when Door to Door shipping came and loaded up the containers with all of our household goods and drove off. Houses are full of echoes, and memories when they are empty.

I remember a few years ago, after I finished a night field command, and as the sun was coming up, I was standing in my living room looking over the back yard with all the flowers in bloom and birds singing as they waited for their turn at the feeders, and I thought about how God had blessed me over and over. I had already had these tremendous inner urgings toward pursuing a calling to ordained ministry, and some questions came to mind. As I looked out over the yard I thought, "Could I walk away from all of this? Could I give up my stuff, sell my home, resign from my career and leave all my dear friends to follow Jesus? Could I ask my wife to do the same thing?" In a quiet living room full of our stuff watching the sunrise, it was easy to say yes.

But when things went from conceptual to real as the truck drove off on the 27th, I must confess that my stomach was roiling and fear came to the forefront of my mind. As far as today's readings go, at that instance I could more readily identify with the scared boatmen or Saul's warriors outfitted and aligned for battle afraid to go meet Goliath, then I could with David.

As I pondered on the lessons for today, I wondered if David was afraid when he faced Goliath. He volunteered to go confront the giant, who according to modern measurements was nine and half feet tall. That's a pretty big guy he was going to go out to fight and the fight was a fight to the death. Goliath was a trained and experienced warrior outfitted for battle. David was a shepherd. Saul tried to get David to wear his armor to at least dress him like a warrior, but David took it off. He went out to face the giant with a sling and five smooth stones.

It's not documented in scripture, but I think David was scared. Biologically and psychologically fear is programmed into human beings. The fear we feel when we face big

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challenges or crises is very real. And fear has associates – worry, helplessness and unworthiness. These emotions are nothing to be ashamed of, but we cannot let them rule our lives. All of those feelings can easily be overcome if we open ourselves and let the Lord work through us. And that is what David did, he relied on his experience. He knew that God had protected him in the past when he faced lions and bears to save the sheep in his father's flock, so he believed God would protect him when he faced Goliath. He didn't let his fear conquer him. That is courage.

When dealing with stressful fearful circumstances, I often think of the verse from the song "Voice of Truth" by the Christian rock group Casting Crowns that goes, "Oh what I would do to have the kind of courage to stand before a giant with just a sling and a stone surrounded by the sound of a thousand warriors wishing they'd of had the strength to stand" And I think, "Why am I afraid and which would I rather be - David or a warrior shaking in my armor?" As a police officer I have had my experiences where I know that our Lord has been there as my shield. So on May 27<sup>th</sup>, I too relied on my experiences and I set my fear aside.

So what about you? As I look about this room, I can see a number of people I know are facing challenges. At the outset of this sermon I said, "We all want to be a hero like David." The truth is we all have been blessed with some of the spirit David, so we, in our way, can be a hero. That is what the imparting of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was about. The spirit is in you. But with our human intellect we suppress the Holy Spirit, and we convince ourselves that we can't overcome what looms before us. We let the fear that we are not smart enough, not skilled enough, not eloquent enough, or not strong enough rule. A lot of times we don't even try because our fears hold us back.

What I have just said, you have probably heard a thousand times - not with these exact words, but some version has been said over and over from generation to generation to the point it is cliché. Both of these stories have been used as metaphors for people confronting big challenges – the giants and storms in their lives. They are transcendent examples of how, with God's help and Jesus presence, we need not fear. It sounds so simple, but we all know it is not.

The fear we feel when we face big challenges or crises is very real and nothing to be ashamed of. The struggle to overcome fear is difficult, but hold tightly to this - Jesus is there right beside you. Call on him and he will calm the storm and give you the strength to overcome your fears. Amen.