

That Sinking Feeling....

[Texts - I Samuel 17; Mark 4:35-41]

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This morning's Scripture readings raise the issue of facing our greatest fears and challenges, and overcoming them. In our Old Testament reading, the armies of Israel are literally confronted with a *giant* challenge! Goliath of Gath has paralyzed the Israelites with fear. His sheer size and his thunderous taunting terrifies even the bravest of Israeli soldiers. There's no one among them willing to confront this massive and menacing foe. That is until David, the young shepherd, arrives on the scene and boldly steps forward to take-on the challenge.

For centuries, the story of David and Goliath has epitomized the willingness of the little person to take-on the giant - whether it be the big bad bully on the playground, the overwhelming bureaucracy of big government, or the corrupt corporate CEO and his massive army of lawyers. David's "Goliath" is an actual giant - the huge and ferocious champion of the Philistines. He is strong and battle-hardened - capable of killing with sword or spear, or even his bare hands. David, on the other hand, is relatively small, with no war experience; but he does have some advantages.

As a shepherd, David is used to putting himself forward in order to protect the weak and frightened sheep; to stand-up against fierce and growling predators. He also realizes that he will need to depend on more than his own strength, in order to succeed. Fortunately, most of David's formative years have been spent developing a strong faith and an inner peace, which serves him well in this dangerous and pivotal moment. So, with a remarkable confidence and composure, and a steady hand, David hits his towering target right between the eyes! And [as the old song says] "...the giant came tumbling down!"

In this morning's New Testament reading, Jesus also demonstrates an amazing serenity and strength, in the midst of a dangerous and life threatening situation. He and his disciples are in a boat, crossing the Sea of Galilee. The trip starts out smoothly, but suddenly a frightening storm strikes, and huge waves begin to fill the boat, threatening to sink it. When the disciples look for Jesus, they find that he's in the back of the boat, sleeping peacefully on a cushion. So they shake him, and wake him, and

try to convey to him their own sense of panic and fear. “Teacher, don’t you care that we’re perishing?” They’re afraid - rightly afraid - of the destructive power of the roaring wind and the raging sea. And they hope that Jesus can do something about it; which he does.

According to our story, Jesus wakes-up, rebukes the wind, and says to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceases, and “there is a great calm....” Now, there may have been a “great calm” upon the water; but within those disciples there arises a new and different fear. That storm was certainly scary; but to be in the same boat with this amazingly powerful person, suddenly seems equally alarming. They ask one another, “Who *is* this person, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

This supernatural story is a spectacular vehicle for showing how the disciples are beginning to recognize that Jesus has a tremendously powerful connection to God *Almighty!* And as they’ve been taught, God Almighty is definitely One to be feared! Fortunately, though, just as Jesus speaks words of calm and peace to the wind and waves, he also speaks words of calm and peace to his frightened friends. “Why are you afraid?” Jesus asks, “Have you still no faith?”

In this story, like in the story of David and Goliath, *faith* is a crucial factor in conquering fear; but it’s important to clarify what the word “faith” actually means. The *faith* of which Jesus speaks, isn’t the kind of “faith” where you blindly close your eyes to the world around you, and reject the realities of historical or scientific insights. Genuine faith doesn’t require that people try to make themselves believe things that are really hard to believe! That’s not faith, that’s mental manipulation. According to Jesus, *faith* means that you and I *trust* in the ultimate goodness, protection, and care of the Divine Source from whom we all derive. And we can do this, Jesus says, because the Holy One truly is *trust-worthy!* In sharp contrast to the fear-filled message of many religious leaders, Jesus proclaims that God isn’t a giant, judgmental bully who is out to get us! Instead, the Holy One who gives us life, really does love us and compassionately cares about all of our lives. And the more you and I learn to trust that love, and to put our faith in that remarkable Good News, the more we will find a genuine sense of peace, confidence and well-being rising-up within us.

Throughout our lives, storms *will* rage around us, or within us; and giant, overwhelming problems will arise which can threaten our safety and security. *Fear* is a natural reaction to those kind of menacing circumstances. However, Jesus comes to remind us, that whatever happens in Life, Our Divine Source is for us, with us, and within us. And the Holy One's desire, isn't to fill us with fear; but to replace our fears with faith and confidence, wholeness and peace.

You and I never know, from day to day, what Life will bring us. Sometimes we seem to just cruise along with the gentle wind at our backs. Then suddenly, things drastically change; and we feel battered and beaten and ready to sink into the darkness of despair. Family problems arise, financial stress knocks us for a loop, serious illness strikes, and our own frailty and mortality smacks us right between the eyes! In every one of these situations, the crucial thing for you and me to remember is that even though Life's circumstances and conditions *will* change, the reality of Divine Love and Grace will always remain constant and sure. And just as Jesus' peaceful presence in that turbulent boat calms his followers' fears, so Christ's presence today - among us and within us - can keep us steady and strong, as we move together over Life's challenging sea.