

“In the Storm, In the Battle”

1 Samuel 17:4-11, 32, 37, 41-45, 48-49; Mark 4:35-41

preached on June 14, 2009

This morning we look at two very familiar stories. One is David's slaying of Goliath. That is so well known that it is commonly used in literature, sports, and news stories whenever the size or estimated abilities of opponents is vastly different. It was the headline when Cassius Clay knocked out Sonny Liston, when Joe Namath and the Jets beat the Colts in Super Bowl III, and whenever the Yankees lost a World Series. We saw it last year when the Tampa Bay Rays won the American League title and then again this year when the Cleveland Cavaliers lost in basketball. Countless short stories, books, and movies have used it for their plot. We know it well. Then we turn to Jesus who quieted a nasty storm. He yelled at the storm and then his disciples. Most Christians are familiar with the event. And though we know them well, still there are lessons to learn, their differences and commonalities. What they have in common is easy - a very heavy dose of fear and faith. But their differences are found in their very nature and how we are to react to them. Let's look a little closer at the storm.

Jesus had had a very long day teaching the crowds along with a fuller, more concentrated time with the disciples. He used stories and parables as he always did. But Jesus was also a bit frustrated with the disciples because he thought he had been teaching easy, basic stuff but it was just not getting through to them. So after pouring out a lot of energy he decided that they all needed a break. They got in a boat and headed to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus immediately went to sleep in the back of the boat while the disciples stood around and talked and sailed.

Suddenly a storm came upon them with ripping winds and powerful waves. That wasn't unusual for the Sea of Galilee. There are mountains right up to the water, and when storm fronts move over that obstacle, without warning the winds and rains come flying down on the sea. It was not unusual and yet this storm was. We know it was because among these disciples were at least four experienced fishermen. They had certainly survived night storms before. Surely they would have been on the open sea taking on water some other time in their life. But this storm was so fierce, attacking with such voracity that even the experienced sailors were scared. That had to be one powerful storm.

But there is another clue that tells us something about that storm. When Jesus woke up and looked around he shouted, "Siopa," which is often translated "Quiet", "Silence", or even "Peace." It literally means, "Lose the ability to utter any sound." I think that Jesus got up, looked at that storm and shouted "Shut up!" Now Jesus used that same word once before in Mark. A man was possessed by a demon. And when that demon was confronted by Jesus he began to argue and whine about whether Jesus had the right to pronounce judgment on him, like a child who thinks bedtime is too early. Jesus was not in the mood to debate and so he said, "Just shut up!" Now think about that. Jesus spoke to a demon the same way he spoke to this storm. What does that tell us? This was no ordinary storm. It was demonic in nature looking to destroy life and perhaps even attacking Jesus himself. It is no wonder that the disciples were scared.

In our world, in our lives there are times when we find ourselves in the midst of the storm. The storms might come in our businesses, our finances, or our homes. They might appear in our relationships with friends, neighbors, children, parents, siblings, or spouse. Storms sometimes attack our physical, mental, or

emotional health. These storms can come upon us so suddenly, so powerfully. They might be similar to situations we have faced before, but now it is somehow different, somehow overpowering and we are gripped by fear. When we don't know what to do; when we don't know which way to turn; when everything we try or even consider seems so inadequate; how can we find a way to cope, to deal with it all.

The disciples did something right. They turned to Jesus. It says in the text that he was sleeping. That was part of the human limitation of Jesus, but in Psalm 121 we read that *AHe who watches over us never slumbers or sleeps.*” We can go to Jesus at any time, from any place. When we call to Him, He will answer. He will give us the strength and insight to fight the storms of life that surround us. He will help us deal with whatever is before us. Often people say that God will give us no more than we can handle. I guess that is true but I am not very concerned about what God gives me. It is what the world throws at me that I'm worried about. And what I have learned in life and faith is that there is no worldly or other-worldly storm that God cannot handle. As long as I walk with God, as long as I strive to live in the Lord Jesus Christ, I will be able to live in the joy, the power, and the peace of his presence even in the midst of the storm.

When Jesus saw this demonic storm attacking his world, attacking his people, he acted to defuse the situation. But afterwards he didn't immediately go back to sleep. First he took the opportunity to reprimand the disciples. *AWhy were you so frightened? Do you still have no faith?*” Now Jesus did scold them but not because they should have done more. He was upset because they allowed fear to control them, to prevent them from acting. Jesus said, "Didn't you think that I could handle this?" That says to us that even when we know we are in over our heads, even in the midst of the fiercest storms, there is no reason to panic.

Bishop Felton May would sometimes refer to an individual as an unassuming presence. These were people who were able to remain calm even in the midst of the storm. They did not assume defeat. They would not cry out, as the disciples did, that the next stop is death and destruction. No! Such individuals have a deep, abiding faith. They know that when we are connected to Jesus, there is nothing that can hold us back; nothing that can keep us down; nothing that can overwhelm or defeat us. There is always a way out. That way may be stormy. It may be tough and hard to navigate. We might get rocked and rolled and do things that we would rather not so, but we will not be defeated. There is always a way to go, and for those who are living in faith, that way is Jesus. When we find ourselves in the storms of life that we just are not able to handle, we need to trust the power and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ; we need to have faith to overcome the fears, and to go and stand by the side of God.

In the storm we go to God, we go to Jesus. But battles are different from storms. Where we may be completely overmatched by storms, battles are something we can do something about. We enter into battles. We are the active party and what we do can make a big difference in the outcome. That takes us to the story of David and Goliath. We all remember the sling shot and the stone to the forehead, but do you remember the rest of the story?

Israel was at war with the Philistines. Nothing new there. It still goes on today. But for this particular war the Philistines said that instead of everyone getting killed, we'll send out our best soldier and you send out

yours. Whoever wins the battle, wins the war. Of course the Philistines knew who their warrior would be - Goliath. Over nine feet tall. His armor weighed about 125 pounds. The iron tip of his spear was 15 pounds all by itself. Goliath was one big, powerful dude. The Israelites liked the idea of only one guy fighting instead of everyone, but when they saw Goliath, their mood changed big time. Fear seized the whole group. They were paralyzed, and they backed off hoping that this giant would not attack.

Well Goliath wasn't thrilled with the retreating tactics of the Israelites. He was ready to fight. So he started to insult the troops, and then he started denigrating their God. That was a tremendous insult. Even today Israel will speak of the Lord who liberated them from slavery, led them through the wilderness, and gave them the Promised Land. Goliath said "That was centuries ago. What has he done for you lately?" He tried to get the soldiers so mad that one of them would be foolish enough to come out and challenge the big bully. But their fear was greater than their faith. Filled with terror, they simply hid in the bushes and shadows.

It is then when our hero, the diminutive David arrives. He had not been there before because he was too young. Remember, he was the baby of the family. The only reason he showed up at all was because mom was worried that her sons weren't eating right. She made lunch for them and sent David to deliver it. Well when David got there, there was this big guy yelling and screaming, insulting the Israelites, the soldiers, their families, their leaders, and their God. Maybe he was too young to be intimidated, but he said, "Why are you putting up with this? Why doesn't someone go and take him out?" I'm sure there was a bunch of mumbling and grumbling, and someone probably said, "Why don't you do it, kid." And he said, AOK. I will."

It is said that if you can keep your head while all those around you are losing theirs, you probably don't know the gravity of the situation. That was David's position. He had the faith of a child but that was easy and natural because he was a child. And it was that child-like faith, his strong confidence in the Lord that would bring him through the battle. Saul tried to help David by giving him his own armor, but on the small David, it looked like a bad Halloween costume. He could not fight in that. He couldn't even move in that. David finally convinced everyone to just let him go out on his own, using the tools and the talents that the Lord had given him.

You know the ending. Goliath thought it was a joke and then decided to squash David like a bug. Choosing not to wait for that, David put a stone in his sling, waved it around his head, and took the big man down. Israel was delivered once again, this time through the fearless and unwavering faith of a small boy.

There are some things that we need to learn from this. First is that there are battles all around us just waiting for us to get involved. Many of our adversaries think that they can easily devour us. They underestimate the power of the Church and the Christians within it. Unfortunately, many Churches and Christians underestimate their power as well. There are political battles and philosophical battles. There are battles over control and lifestyles. There are battles over life and death, direction and perception. But when we are in Christ we cannot be taken down. We will not be knocked out. We cannot let fear limit us for when we do, like the soldiers of Israel, we are defeated before we ever start.

Secondly we must not act defensively. The soldiers on the field were only interested in protecting themselves which only prevented them from doing anything positive. King Saul tried to protect David by covering him with armor but only succeeded in limiting his ability to move, to react, and attack. In the same way many churches and Christians today are more interested in staying safe and secure than going out on the field of battle. But Jesus said, *"Those who seek to save their life will lose it."* (Matthew 10:39) And this hero, David, chose to do what was right, and what was righteous. Even as a child he could see that in trying to save our life, we lose it. It is only in losing our life in Christ, surrendering ourselves to God wholly and completely that we are able to understand what true life is all about. Too often we believe that we can save the church by staying inside the walls, by rarely going out and limiting who comes in, but in truth that is an existence filled with fear that leads only to death. It is only by going out in faith, by walking in the power and grace of the Lord, being willing to fight the battles for right and righteousness that life can continue, that life is worth living.

And finally, it is knowing that we have all the tools and talents we need to be victorious. So often we fall into the "if only" trap. If only we had this, if only we had that, then we could make things happen. But let me tell you, we have the greatest, most powerful tool we need. We have the grace, the power, and the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and our faith makes it all available to us. We have strength and ingenuity. We know in our heads and in our hearts that the Lord has given us many gifts, and in the moment we need it, it will be there, as long as we are willing to go forth to enter into the battle; as long as we are willing to take on the foes of fear and death; as long as we will be the people of the Lord Jesus Christ, walking in faith, living in grace, striving to do that which is right, that the righteousness of God might be seen and felt throughout the land.

In this world there are storms that will try to overwhelm us and put us down. There are battles of enormous proportions waiting to be fought. We can look at the world with all its problems and threats and say that it's just too big for us to do anything about it. We can look at the poverty, death and disease and lament that we are overmatched, that there's nothing we can do. Or we can do what is right and what is righteous. Everyday I look around this town, I look around this county and I see empty eyes, empty hearts, empty souls. I see people who are struggling to get by one day more, seeking the funds or the fix to just make it one more time. I see people living in fear of crime, violence, and abuse, people who don't know where to turn. I hear people insulting our God in word and deed constantly. I see demonic forces trying to devour us. And many churches, many in the church have decided to hide in fear, to protect a way of existence that only leads to death. But we shall live.

We can make a difference. We can do something to get drugs out of streets and out of our homes. We can make a difference. We can make a difference by helping provide sufficient food and adequate housing. We can make a difference. We can make a difference by giving people hope and a reason to live. We can take on the battles; we can go through the storms because we are the people of Jesus Christ and in his name, in his presence we will not be held back. We will not be defeated. We shall do what is right and what is righteous. We will proclaim the Word of God and offer the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. We will love them as God has loved us. And we will go forth to let the whole world know that we shall be victorious, that we are the victors even now; that the love and grace of God will abound. The storms are going to be

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shut down and our enemies are going to be put down; for God’s kingdom will be established on earth just as it is in heaven. And it will begin right here, in our church, in our hearts, and in our lives. In your life may it be so. Amen.