

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

June 20, 2021, The 4th Sunday of Pentecost/11th Sunday of Ordinary Time

1 Samuel 17:1a, 4-11, 32-50, Mark 4:35-41

Giants and Storms

King Saul and the Israelite army had met their match. For forty days they had been intimidated by the Giant Goliath, who offered to fight any of their warriors, and the winner of that battle would win the victory for their nation. But not one of them wanted to go up against Goliath, because it was clearly a losing battle from the start. The threat was real, the destruction was certain, there was no hope.

But into that setting came the young boy, David. He didn't just see a giant; he saw someone taunting the living God he trusted and followed. He saw someone claiming to be stronger than God, and David was confident that God would be with him as he went to face Goliath. David told King 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."

So, he called out to Goliath, "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied." And with one sling shot and one smooth stone Goliath was defeated forever.

The disciples were in the boat, crossing the Sea of Galilee at night. The Sea was known for its sudden and violent storms that could swamp a boat and kill the most experienced sailors. The disciples had every right to be terrified. Jesus was sleeping, and their boat was going to go down in the storm.

But the moment they called to him, Jesus "woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!"

Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm."

If anyone could tell a story of Goliaths and storms at sea, it's us, isn't it? For 16 months our lives have been different than anything any of us have ever experienced before. And during those 16 months we have experienced other losses, changes and griefs.

But even before last March of 2020 most of us could have already told stories of Giants and Storms.

Some of us have many stories to tell.

We have had a lot in our lives that has towered over us, or nearly swamped us.

I think because I've had many conversations lately about how we as individuals, as families, as a church, are going to move through and beyond these past 16 months, I've been thinking about how we will tell the stories of these days and months in years to come.

I've been thinking about how we let this pandemic journey shape our life in the days and months and years ahead.

I have said to some of you already that at some level I don't think we are not going to fully understand all the ways that we are affected and changed by the giants and storms of 2020 and half of 2021, for quite a while.

But I do think that we can be intentional about some of the ways we move forward from these storms and giants—and the storms and giants that came before 2020..

Think about it for a moment: what if David let his battle with Goliath keep him up at night for years after the battle, because he let Goliath live inside his heart, always shouting at him across the field of battle? What if that battle with Goliath continued to be the defining force in David's life.

What if the disciples allowed themselves to relive that storm over and over again, focusing on the moments *before* Jesus woke up and calmed the storm when they were the most scared, and that became the defining force in their lives?

As we begin to slowly move into the new normal, whatever that will be, we have a choice about whom and what we carry around inside ourselves.

We have a choice about whom and what we focus on, as we reflect on the giants and the storms:

On those nights we can't sleep,

on those days our stomachs are in a knot because of what might happen,

or we're seething because of what someone said or didn't say to us today, or yesterday
or in the midst of the pandemic,

on those nights when the "what if's" and the "if only's" are consuming our thoughts...

let's ask ourselves if we're resurrecting the same giant over and over again,

and letting that giant stomp around inside our stomach, and stomping on our heart again
and again.

Let's ask ourselves if we are carrying the stormy sea inside us, so that the crashing
waves and high winds feel like they are battering our insides and swamping our
hearts again and again.

We have a choice about whom and what we carry around inside ourselves.

We have a choice about whom and what we focus on as we reflect on the giants and the storms that have been a part of our stories.

I know how real giants and storms are, I know that we are still moving through this season of Pandemic, I know real giants and real storms have attacked and challenged some of us. Please don't hear me making them smaller than they really were.

And yet there is Someone MORE real and MORE true than the Goliaths and the stormy seas of these last months, and the things that have happened in the past to us and to those we love.

David faced Goliath because he knew the Living God was with him. And all it took was a sling shot and one smooth stone

The disciples called for help because they knew that Jesus could save them.

And Jesus stood up in that boat and "he rebuked the wind,
and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!"

Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm."

As people of faith, today is the day to ask for God's help as we move forward, so that we don't let the Goliaths be at the center of our hearts and the pits of our stomachs and the only story we tell for the rest of our lives.

I think faith in God invites us to be intentional in the days ahead to replace those Goliaths with our Living God who is more powerful than any giant, living or dead, more powerful than any pandemic here or in years to come.

As people of faith, today is the day to move our focus from the waves we've allowed inside ourselves that try to drown us,

and the winds that batter our lives from the inside out.

Today is the day to look inside the boat instead.

Because in the midst of the storms, stands Jesus, who is in the boat with us.

And Jesus is the only one

in the midst of the wind and the waves and the storms

who has the power to silence the wind,

and tame the waves

and bring peace and calm.

This is the day to ask the question:

Who, or what do we have living inside our hearts and our lives?

Who is at the center of our journey moving forward?

May we have the courage of David, who trusted the Living God,

And the willingness of the disciples to cry out for help,

as we push giants and storms to the outside of our lives,

and welcome the Living Christ

of gentle power and healing love

into the center of our hearts and lives.

This is the best, and truly the only way, for us to walk forward into the second half of 2021, and into all the ways that our days will unfold.

The promise is true: Christ will always be in the boat with us.

This is our deepest truth for the days and years ahead. Amen.

BENEDICTION

St. Asaph's Mother's Union, Wales

The Lord of Light—shine on you

The Lord of Peace—dwell in you,

The Lord of Might—help you,

The Lord of Love—enfold you,

The Lord of Wisdom—enlighten you

Then go out as the Lord's witnesses,

To share the Good News of God's love for us

In the gift of God's Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.