

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

June 23, 2024, 5th Sunday After Pentecost/The 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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

GIANTS, AND WINDS, AND WAVES, OH MY!

Ten years ago, I used to meet with a wonderful group of friends who were a great mix of Christians from a variety of walks of life. We'd meet once a month a watch different video series and talk about faith and life. Part of what made the evening so fun was we weren't all pastors. There were several pastors, but there were also several retired college and high school educators, an author and politician, an engineer and a church educator. There was also pizza and beverages of our choice during the evening. Some of those good people now reside in Heaven and I look forward to the day I can rejoin the group there and keep the conversation going.

There was a wonderful retired Presbyterian pastor I'll name Bill who was in his early 90's and I'd look forward to hearing his wisdom and his great sense of humor. Plus, he had also spent time in Northern Ireland, so we swapped stories about a place we both loved.

One week we watched an amazing DVD called "The Power of Forgiveness." The film looks research about the psychological and physical effects of forgiveness on individuals. The film looks at the school shooting in 2006 in the Amish community in Pennsylvania, peacemaking work in Northern Ireland, and the effects of 9/11 on three women who lost family members. Interviews take place with authors Thomas Moore and ~~Mirianne Williamson~~, the Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, Holocaust survivor Elie Weisel, and others. The views of forgiveness from different faith traditions were also explored.

Several times as we watched the film, we took breaks to discuss what we were seeing, and to talk about the reality of forgiveness in our own lives. I've never forgotten when Bill said that night. He said that he couldn't really think of anyone he held a grudge against across his years of life and ministry. But he said that at night, in the middle of the night when he couldn't sleep, he prayed for forgiveness for himself.

He said he'd think back over his life and think about how he could have been more attentive to his parents, spent more time with his children, and the ways he treated people through the years. He said he'd think of big and little times when he could have treated people better.

Then Bill said, "I ask God for forgiveness for these things that happened so long ago." And then God, in his own way says to me: "Bill, I don't remember those times, I forgave you years ago."

He continued; "God has already forgiven me and forgotten all these events. They don't even exist for God. But they are keeping me up at night."

When Bill said that 10 years ago, the room got really quiet. I don't know about the rest of the group, but I felt really sad, that this kind, generous man, who had completed such a wonderful life in ministry, who was loved by so many of us was being kept awake at night pondering all the things he thought he had done wrong.

Bill's nighttime wrestling with his past shifted my thinking of this morning's sermon from being about

the storms that rage around us,

and the giants that stride toward us across life's battle fields,

to the storms and giants that keep us up at night because they live inside us.

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 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 trusted that God was stronger, telling 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 Angel Armies, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied." And with one sling shot and one smooth stone Goliath was defeated and dead.

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 shouted at the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!"

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

Goliath and the storm were real.

The events in our lives that have towered over us, or nearly swamped our lives are real too.

The losses and griefs we carry inside us are real.

The memories of the wrongs and abuses done to us are real.

The memories of the wrongs and abuses we've done to others are real.

The hurts, and slights, and torments we have suffered through the years are real.

The situations that aren't fair are real.

Our sorrows are real.

Our regrets are real.

Goliath and the storm, and the wind, and the waves inside us are real.

But 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?

What if the disciples allowed themselves to relive that storm over and over again, by moving the wind and the waves inside their hearts and lives?

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

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

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 five years ago, or twenty-five years ago

on those nights when our fears are winning,

on those days 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, or stomp 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 who and what we carry around inside ourselves.

We have a choice about who and what we focus on as we reflect on the giants and the storms.

I know how real giants and storms are,
and yet there is Someone MORE real and MORE true.

David faced Goliath because he knew the Living God was with him.

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

And Jesus stood up in that boat and "he shouted at 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, so that we can move the Goliaths out
of our hearts, and out of the pits of our stomachs,

and replace those Goliaths with our Living God

who is more powerful than any giant, living or dead.

Our strong powerful Savior will bring peace and calm and take away the power of
the Goliaths.

As people of faith, today is the day to stop focusing on 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. Jesus is in our lives
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.

And let me say that then we may find we need to invite others into our journey with Jesus of
banishing the Goliaths and the wind and the waves. Because sometimes it isn't a one and done journey
as Jesus helps us silence the voices of the Goliaths and the storms. Sometimes it takes time.
Sometimes once we have asked Jesus for help, and we are resting on his presence in the boat, we will
find that we need to invite others into the boat too.

So, then we invite our pastor and or a spiritual director.

We invite a wise counselor or therapist to join the journey, because some Goliaths need
a trained Goliath-banisher to join the team.

We invite wise friends who we trust to walk beside us to help us on the journey.
We don't have to do any of this alone.

Jesus has given us friends and family and trained specialists as gifts for the
journey.

We are not alone as we banish the Goliaths and the winds and the waves
and the storms.

This is the day to face the truth and answer the questions:

Who, or what is living inside our hearts and our lives?

May we have the courage of David,
And the willingness of the disciples to cry out for help,
as we push giants and storms to the outside,
and welcome the Christ
of gentle power and healing love
into the center of our hearts and lives. Amen.

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