

Stay Cool. Take a Nap. Speak.

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, June 24, 2018

I Samuel 17:32-49, Psalm 9, II Corinthians 6:1-13, Mark 4:35-41.

Today's gospel lesson hits a little close to home, doesn't it. Not even a year ago, we were all following hurricane season in horror. We all knew someone or knew of someone who evacuated or chose to shelter in place. TV crews followed it in real time. Even watching the winds and the rains from the comfort of our living rooms was terrifying. Who knows what this season will bring.

Last year's storms give us a picture of what the disciples in the boat were facing. They did not have a choice about whether to evacuate or shelter in place. The Sea of Galilee was and is notorious for pop up storms. The weather seems fine, so you go out on a boat for a day of fishing or to travel to the other side. All of a sudden a devastating storm blows down from the mountains out of nowhere and you are stuck in the middle of a raging sea in a tiny boat. Everyone knew someone who had perished in one of these storms.

So the disciples were not exaggerating when they came to Jesus. This was not overanxious drama. They were sincerely and understandably scared to death. "Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing?"

But Jesus had slept through it all.

David had a similar kind of cool. Saul and the armies of Israel were terrified of Goliath. The Philistines had offered Israel a sweet deal – a one on one battle to the death rather than a clash of armies. Just one of Israel's soldiers could go up against Goliath and put a stop to all of this fighting. But Goliath was so big even the bravest soldiers were scared to try. Only David, the kid who showed up from the fields, was willing to take him on.

Both of these scriptures point something larger than the story itself. Jesus calming a storm was not just about a rainy day. David and Goliath was more than a war story.

David represented the whole people of Israel. They were small by comparison with other nations. They had been entrusted with God's hope and dream for the world. It was given in the law God gave to Moses, which then numbered five books. Maybe the stones represented the law or maybe that's just what David happened to pick up. By the time the story of David and most of the Hebrew scriptures were written, the Hebrew people had been conquered by these bigger nations and taken into exile. While in exile, as they faced possible genocide and extinction, they wrote the scriptures. They drew encouragement from their history. They saw in David a symbol for

their own time. If little David could trust in the Lord as he faced the giant, surely we can too. The battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand.

By the time of Jesus, the people of Israel were once again under outside control. By then the empire was Rome. We admire the Roman Empire for many things today but biblically speaking they were the enemy. The Roman system ran contrary to the laws of God. It was a lot like Egypt had been. It enriched the powerful and crushed the poor and enslaved the stranger rather than welcome them. Things were bad during the time of Jesus, so bad that Rome crucified him. But by the time Mark's gospel was written things had gotten worse. Jerusalem was all but destroyed. Roman armies leveled the Temple. The early Christians were living in a war zone. It was chaos.

The people reading Mark's gospel for the first time were living in a storm. They wondered if God had abandoned them. They probably had said these very words in their prayers. Do you not care that we are perishing? But Jesus had not abandoned them. He was only resting. When he woke up, he calmed the seas. Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

David and Jesus did many other things that were not written in the scriptures, so we always have to ask why these stories made the cut. Why did the Hebrew people and the gospel writer preserve these particular memories? Maybe they knew God's people would always have to go up against giants. Maybe they knew followers of Jesus would always have to face down storms.

Like David, we face a lot of giants. In baptism we promise to renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God. The forces of evil and inhumanity and violence that destroy God's children seem like giants, so powerful it seems as if there is nothing we can do. And when these forces go to work they produce chaos as destructive as any storm.

So notice that when facing a giant and when facing a storm, our heroes remained cool. The army of Israel was in a panic but David was confident. Others tried to talk him out of it, saying you are just a boy, but David remembered how he had faced down wild animals in the past. Goliath taunted him and tried to get him to retreat, but David stayed engaged. He knew God was with him, so he was not afraid.

David reminds me of young people today. Young people walked right up to the giants in the land. Young people are leading efforts to confront the giants of racism and bigotry and gun violence and the waste and pollution of creation. Young people led the civil rights movement. Dr. King was 26 during the Montgomery bus boycott – half my age. Older people like me sometimes try to discourage them. We say the giant is too big and they are too young. "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy." Or we tell them they should go about the fight our way, like Saul saying, "Here, put on my armor."

Fortunately, Saul and the armies of Israel realized they needed to get out of this kid's way and let him go to work. David solved a problem King Saul and all his armies could not handle.

There's a lesson here in the scriptures. Sometimes it is best to step aside and let young people lead. They are often more invested in the future because they are going to live with it longer.

So I say to the young people here today, and there are lots of you, we need you. Don't let anyone stop you from confronting the giants in the land.

And I say to those of us who are no longer young people, listen to what they say and pay attention to their concerns. Young people know where the giants are.

And I say to this church, this is why youth ministry matters. One of our primary tasks is to help young people discover they are God's beloved and we are all God's beloved children. And when we live like that we can change the world.

David shows us how young people can confront the giants. Jesus shows us how we can all confront the storms.

In the midst of a terrible storm, the first thing Jesus did was take a nap. He did not panic. He did not watch with terror as every wave crashed into the boat. He stayed out of the chaos. He had spent all day teaching. He must have been tired. He needed a nap.

We all need naps sometimes. In the face of the storms around us, we have to take care of ourselves. Take breaks. Maybe watch a little less inflammatory TV or try not to fret about the state of the world 24/7. It is helpful to take a nap from time to time.

But Jesus didn't sleep forever. He woke up rested, ready to act.

Eventually, we may wake up, too. We wake up to different things at different times. Events in the world around us can wake us up. Maybe you never thought about immigration until recently but now you're awake. Personal experiences can wake us up. Maybe you never worried about health care until you or someone you love got sick and had no insurance. Other people sometimes wake us up. Reading, learning, and listening can wake us up. Lots of things can wake us up. And I don't know about you, but if I wake up in the middle of the night I might as well get up because I won't go back to sleep. Once we wake up to the storms around us, we likely won't be able to ignore them.

So there is wisdom in resting and napping and not getting too anxious. But at some point something will wake us up. And all of a sudden we find we are in the midst of a storm.

When Jesus woke up, what did he do? He used his voice. Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Note he did not speak in ways that added to the chaos. He did not rant about the evils of the wind and the sea. He didn't pine for the days when the seas were calmer. He didn't complain to others, "Can you believe how destructive they are? I wish the wind and the sea would calm down and work together." He spoke to them. He rebuked what needed to be rebuked, and he spoke peace. He did both. He named what was wrong and he called for what he wanted to see. The two go together. If we are only rebuking, only condemning, we're

not following the example of Jesus. We also have to describe what we want to see. Peace! Be still! And then, the scriptures say the wind ceased and there was a dead calm.

I know a lot of you feel like you are facing a giant. I know a lot of you feel like you are living in a storm. It may be a personal battle you are fighting on your own. It may be the chaos and storms of the world around us that scare you to death.

Stay cool like David. Get enough rest like Jesus. When something wakes you up, speak.

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Rev. Grace Burton-Edwards
St. Thomas Episcopal Church
2100 Hilton Ave.
Columbus, GA 31906
StThomasColumbus.org